

INTERNATIONAL PD SHORT STORIES

FEBRUARY 2017



Landscape by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot

This is a collection of short stories from around the world: Japan, Spain, France, Russia, England, Czechoslovakia, and America. A few are in their native languages, others in English. Compilation by Matt Pierard, Creative Commons Non-commercial copyright 2017.

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EL REY BURGUES

By Rubén Darío

From The Project Gutenberg EBook of *La voz de la conseja, t.I*, compiled by Emilio Carrère

¡Amigo!, el cielo está opaco; el aire, frío; el día, triste. Un cuento alegre..., así como para distraer las brumosas y grises melancolías, helo aquí.

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Había en una ciudad inmensa y brillante un rey muy poderoso, que tenía trajes caprichosos y ricos, esclavas desnudas, blancas y negras; caballos de largas crines, armas flamantísimas, galgos rápidos y monteros con cuernos de bronce, que llenaban el viento con sus fanfarrias. ¿Era un rey poeta? No, amigo mío: era el Rey Burgués.

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Era muy aficionado a las artes el soberano y favorecía con gran largueza a sus músicos, a sus hacedores de ditirambos, pintores, escultores, boticarios, barberos y maestros de esgrima.

Cuando iba a la floresta, junto al corzo o jabalí herido y sangriento, hacía improvisar a sus profesores de retórica canciones alusivas; los criados llenaban las copas del vino de oro que hierve, y las mujeres batían palmas con movimientos rítmicos y gallardos. Era un rey sol, en su Babilonia llena de músicas, de carcajadas y de ruido de festín. Cuando se hastiaba de la ciudad bullente, iba de caza, atronando el bosque con sus tropeles; y hacía salir de sus nidos a las aves asustadas, y el vocerío repercutía en lo más escondido de las cavernas. Los perros, de patas elásticas, iban rompiendo la maleza en la carrera, y los cazadores, inclinados sobre el pescuezo de los caballos, hacían ondear los mantos purpúreos, y llevaban las caras encendidas y las cabelleras al viento.

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El rey tenía un palacio soberbio, donde había acumulado riquezas y

objetos de arte maravilloso. Llegaba a él por entre grupos de lilas y extensos estanques, siendo saludado por los cisnes de cuellos blancos antes que por los lacayos estirados. Buen gusto. Subía por una escalera llena de columnas de alabastro y de esmaragdina, que tenía a los lados leones de mármol, como los de los troncos salomónicos. Refinamiento. A más de los cisnes tenía una vasta pajarera, como amante de la armonía, del arrullo, del trino; y cerca de ella iba a ensanchar su espíritu leyendo novelas de M. Ohnet, o bellos libros sobre cuestiones gramaticales, o críticas hermosillescas. Eso sí, defensor acérrimo de la corrección académica en letras, y del modo lamido en artes; alma sublime amante de la lija y de la ortografía.

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¡Japonerías! ¡Chinerías!, por lujo, y nada más.

Bien podía darse el placer de un salón digno del gusto de un Goncourt y de los millones de un Crespo: quimeras de bronce con las fauces abiertas y las colas enroscadas, en grupos fantásticos y maravillosos; lacas de Kioto con incrustaciones de hojas y ramas de una flora monstruosa, y animales de una fauna desconocida; mariposas de raros abanicos junto a las paredes; peces y gallos de colores; máscaras de gestos infernales y con ojos como si fuesen vivos; partesanas de hojas antiquísimas y empuñaduras con dragones devorando flores de loto; y en conchas de huevo, túnicas de seda amarilla, como tejidas con hilos de araña, sembradas de garzas rojas y de verdes matas de arroz; y tibores, porcelanas de muchos siglos, de aquellas en que hay guerreros tártaros con una piel que les cubre hasta los riñones, y que llevan arcos estirados y manojos de flechas.

Por lo demás, había el salón griego, lleno de mármoles: diosas, musas, ninfas y sátiros; el salón de los tiempos galantes con cuadros del gran Watteau y de Chardin; dos, tres, cuatro, ¡cuántos salones!

Y Mecenás se paseaba por todos, con la cara inundada de cierta majestad, el vientre feliz y la corona en la cabeza, como un rey de naipe.

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Un día le llevaron una rara especie de hombre ante su trono, donde se

hallaba rodeado de cortesanos, de retóricos y de maestros de equitación y de baile.

--¿Qué es eso?--preguntó.

--Señor, es un poeta.

El rey tenía cisnes en el estanque, canarios, gorriones, senzontes en la pajarera: un poeta era algo nuevo y extraño.

--Dejadle aquí.

Y el poeta:

--Señor, no he comido.

Y el rey:

--Habla, y comerás.

Comenzó:

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--Señor, ha tiempo que yo canto el verbo del porvenir. He tendido mis alas al huracán, he nacido en el tiempo de la aurora: busco la raza escogida que debe esperar, con el himno en la boca y la lira en la mano, la salida del gran sol. He abandonado la inspiración de la ciudad malsana, la alcoba llena de perfumes, la musa de carne que llena el alma de pequeñez y el rostro de polvos de arroz. He roto el arpa adulona de las cuerdas débiles contra las copas de Bohemia y las jarras donde espumea el vino que embriaga sin dar fortaleza; he arrojado el manto que me hacía parecer histrión, o mujer, y he vestido de modo salvaje y espléndido: mi harapo es de púrpura. He ido a la selva, donde he quedado vigoroso y ahito de leche fecunda y licor de nueva vida; y en la ribera del mar áspero, sacudiendo la cabeza bajo la fuerte y negra tempestad, como un ángel soberbio, o como un semidiós olímpico, he ensayado el yambo dando al olvido el madrigal.

He acariciado a la gran Naturaleza, y he buscado el calor del ideal, el

verso que está en el astro en el fondo del cielo, y el que está en la perla en lo profundo del Océano. ¡He querido ser pujante! Porque viene el tiempo de las grandes revoluciones, con un Mesías todo luz, todo agitación y potencia, y es preciso recibir su espíritu con el poema que sea arco triunfal, de estrofas de acero, de estrofas de oro, de estrofas de amor.

¡Señor!, el arte no está en los fríos envoltorios de mármol, ni en los cuadros lamidos, ni en el excelente señor Ohnet! ¡Señor!, el arte no viste pantalones, ni habla en burgués, ni pone los puntos en todas las íes. El es augusto, tiene mantos de oro, o de llamas, o anda desnudo, y amasa la greda con fiebre, y pinta con luz, y es opulento, y da golpes de ala como las águilas, o _zarpazos_ como los leones. Señor, entre un Apolo y un ganso, preferid al Apolo, aunque el uno sea de tierra cocida y el otro de marfil.

¡Oh, la poesía!

¡Y bien! Los ritmos se prostituyen, se cantan los lunares de las mujeres y se fabrican jarabes poéticos. Además, señor, el zapatero critica mis endecasílabos, y el señor profesor de farmacia pone puntos y comas a mi inspiración. Señor, ¡y vos lo autorizáis todo esto!... El ideal, el ideal...

El rey interrumpió:

--Ya habéis oído. ¿Qué hacer?

Y un filósofo al uso:

--Si lo permitís, señor, puede ganarse la comida con una caja de música; podemos colocarle en el jardín, cerca de los cisnes, para cuando os paseéis.

--Sí--dijo el rey; y dirigiéndose al poeta:--Daréis vueltas a un manubrio. Cerraréis la boca. Haréis sonar una caja de música que toca vales, cuadrillas y galopas, como no preferáis moriros de hambre. Pieza de música por pedazo de pan. Nada de jerigonzas ni de ideales. Id.

Y desde aquel día pudo verse a la orilla del estanque de los cisnes al

poeta hambriento, que daba vueltas al manubrio: tiririrín, tiririrín...,
¡avergonzado a las miradas del gran sol! ¿Pasaba el rey por las
cercanías? ¡Tiririrín, tiririrín...! ¿Había que llenar el estómago?
¡Tiririrín! Todo entre las burlas de los pájaros libres que llegaban a
beber rocío en las lilas floridas, entre el zumbido de las abejas que le
picaban el rostro y le llenaban los ojos de lágrimas..., ¡lágrimas
amargas que rodaban por sus mejillas y que caían a la tierra negra!

Y llegó el invierno, y el pobre sintió frío en el cuerpo y en el alma. Y
su cerebro estaba como petrificado, y los grandes himnos estaban en el
olvido, y el poeta de la montaña coronada de águilas no era sino un
pobre diablo que daba vueltas al manubrio: ¡tiririrín!

Y cuando cayó la nieve se olvidaron de él el rey y sus vasallos; a los
pájaros se les abrigó, y a él se le dejó al aire glacial, que le mordía
las carnes y le azotaba el rostro.

Y una noche en que caía de lo alto la lluvia blanca de plumillas
cristalizadas, en el palacio había festín, y la luz de las arañas reía
alegre sobre los mármoles, sobre el oro y sobre las túnicas de los
mandarines de las viejas porcelanas. Y se aplaudían hasta la locura los
brindis del señor profesor de retórica, cuajados de dátiles, de
anapestos y de pirriquios, mientras en las copas cristalinas hervía el
Champaña con su burbujeo luminoso y fugaz. ¡Noche de invierno, noche de
fiesta! Y el infeliz, cubierto de nieve, cerca del estanque, daba
vueltas al manubrio para calentarse, tembloroso y aterido, insultado por
el cierzo, bajo la blancura implacable y helada, en la noche sombría,
haciendo resonar entre los árboles sin hojas la música loca de las
galopas y cuadrillas; y se quedó muerto, pensando en que nacería el sol
del día venidero, y con él el ideal..., y en que el arte no vestiría
pantalones, sino manto de llamas de oro... Hasta que al día siguiente lo
hallaron el rey y sus cortesanos, al pobre diablo de poeta, como
gorrión que mata el hielo, con una sonrisa amarga en los labios, y
todavía con la mano en el manubrio.

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¡Oh, mi amigo!, el cielo está opaco; el aire frío; el día, triste.
Flotan brumosas y grises melancolías...

Pero, ¡cuánto calienta el alma una frase, un apretón de manos a tiempo!
Hasta la vista!



THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

By G. K. Chesterton

From Project Gutenberg's *The Wisdom of Father Brown*

FLAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and mediaeval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

"I've been reading," said Flambeau, "of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean; they put a pulsometer on a man's wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it?"

"I think it very interesting," replied Father Brown; "it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it."

"Do you really mean," demanded his friend, "that you think the two methods equally valuable?"

"I think them equally valueless," replied Brown. "Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnily; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn, before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it."

"The method," remarked the other, "has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science."

“What sentimentalists men of science are!” exclaimed Father Brown, “and how much more sentimental must American men of science be! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That’s a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey; and a jolly rotten test, too.”

“But surely,” insisted Flambeau, “it might point pretty straight at something or other.”

“There’s a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight,” answered the other. “What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I’ve never believed in it since.” And he proceeded to tell the story of his disillusionment.

It happened nearly twenty years before, when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago--where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows:

“Society’s brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim’s Pond, caused so many of our prominent debutantes to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick’s show the year previous, the popular Cannibal

Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr Todd's pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society's scale. This would be all the more telling, as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England's oak-groves. Lord Falconroy's travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected, he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers, and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars."

"Well," asked Usher, "does that interest you?"

"Why, words rather fail me," answered Father Brown. "I cannot think at this moment of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing like that, I don't quite see why it should interest you either."

"Ah!" said Mr Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. "Well, does that interest you?"

The paragraph was headed "Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes," and ran: "Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club, and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault; but he gave everyone the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on the wall above the body a

fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood: 'This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim's Pond--O.R.' A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall in spite of an armed man."

"Well, the literary style is somewhat improved," admitted the priest cheerfully, "but still I don't see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement at Sequah is thirty miles from here; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man's land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree."

"He isn't in any hole," said the governor; "he isn't up any tree."

"Why, how do you know?" asked Father Brown, blinking.

"Would you like to speak to him?" inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide. "He is here?" he exclaimed. "Why, how did your men get hold of him?"

"I got hold of him myself," drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. "I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don't look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields on both sides; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders' webs;--or rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets) as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him."

“It would have been rather awkward,” remarked Brown, “if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race.”

“He was not,” said Usher grimly. “We soon found out who he was; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him.”

“You thought it was the runaway convict,” observed the priest simply, “because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away.”

“I had somewhat better grounds,” replied the governor coolly. “I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized--I mean that fashionable athletes do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill-fitting as to be quite grotesque; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederate’s clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair, if the hair had not been very short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim’s Pond, for which (you will remember) the convict was keeping his bullet; and I sent my walking-stick flying.”

“A brilliant piece of rapid deduction,” said Father Brown; “but had he got a gun?”

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically: “I’ve been told a bullet is not half so useful without it.”

“He had no gun,” said the other gravely; “but that was doubtless due to some very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim.”

“Well, that is possible enough,” answered the priest.

“And it’s hardly worth speculating on,” said Usher, turning to some other papers, “for we know it’s the man by this time.”

His clerical friend asked faintly: “But how?” And Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

“Well, since you are so obstinate,” he said, “let’s begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in common, which is the mention of Pilgrim’s Pond, the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character; one of those that rose on stepping-stones--”

“Of our dead selves to higher things,” assented his companion. “Yes; I know that. Petroleum, I think.”

“Anyhow,” said Usher, “Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair.”

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

“To begin with, on the face of it, there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim’s Pond. Our people aren’t like the English, who will forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities; and there’s no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he’d never even heard of; some labourer he’d locked out, or some clerk in a business he’d busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character; but in this country the relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

“That’s how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim’s Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me, till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of

country road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd's grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy, half-liquid shores in which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I'd forgotten the exact tale; but you know the place I mean; it lies north of Todd's house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage. As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the fence which ran not more than two hundred yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing, and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior--a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me-- then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire's daughter.

"She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it; and a

voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim's Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried 'Mighty Murder!' and shut down the window violently; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow; and returned here not later than eight o'clock.

"I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn't, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconroy; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper--that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire's daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

"I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic; but that's because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury's daughter will be married in St George's, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don't do justice to the climbing and aspiring power of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening-dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life. Todd's daughter was fully eighteen when her

father first made his pile; so there isn't really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise."

"Well," said the priest patiently, "and what did you do next?"

"I reckon you'll be shocked," replied Greywood Usher, "as I know you don't cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I'm given; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that Psychometric Machine I told you about. Now, in my opinion, that machine can't lie."

"No machine can lie," said Father Brown; "nor can it tell the truth."

"It did in this case, as I'll show you," went on Usher positively.

"I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote 'heron' and 'eagle' and 'owl', and when I wrote 'falcon' he was tremendously agitated; and when I began to make an 'r' at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly-arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who's shot him? Isn't that better evidence than a lot of gabble from witnesses--if the evidence of a reliable machine?"

"You always forget," observed his companion, "that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective.

"I mean Man," said Father Brown, "the most unreliable machine I know of. I don't want to be rude; and I don't think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner; but how do you know you observed it right? You say the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it

naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse."

"I tell you," cried the American in the utmost excitement, "I was as cool as a cucumber."

"Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers," said Brown with a smile. "And almost as cool as you."

"Well, this one wasn't," said Usher, throwing the papers about. "Oh, you make me tired!"

"I'm sorry," said the other. "I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn't he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody."

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

"And that," he cried, "is just what I'm going to give you. I tried the machine first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards and the machine, sir, is right."

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. "I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I've said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question; and showed nothing but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than

once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

“Then, sir, the machine was on its trial; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me and began to say in a low voice: ‘Oh, I can’t stick this any more. If you must know all about me--’

“At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demoniacally distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the word was a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

“‘Drugger Davis!’ she shouted. ‘They’ve got Drugger Davis!’

“Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and streetwalkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I’m not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depraved criminals that ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough because he did it in the same manner as those milder--or meaner--crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther; and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money

instead of borrowing it; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, but still with the same bad result for them. Well, there is your innocent man, and there is his innocent record. Even, since then, four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn't the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?"

"As to what you've done for him," replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, "you've saved him from the electrical chair. I don't think they can kill Druggar Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it's obvious that you haven't got him. Mr Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other. "Why should he be innocent of that crime?"

"Why, bless us all!" cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, "why, because he's guilty of the other crimes! I don't know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the best, and a poison at the worst; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated most poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted--let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn't do. He didn't storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn't write on the wall with his own hand, to say he had done it. He didn't stop to state that his justification was self-defence. He didn't explain that he had no quarrel with the poor warder. He didn't name the house of the rich man to which he was going with the gun. He didn't write his own initials in a man's blood. Saints alive! Can't you see the whole character is different, in good and evil? Why, you don't seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you'd never had any vices of your own."

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammered and rattled in an

unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade shoved up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger's. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard and whiskers through which the nose could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But, above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.

"See here, old man Usher," shouted the being in the red handkerchief, "I'm getting tired. Don't you try any of your hide-and-seek on me; I don't get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I'll let up on the fancy clockwork. Keep him here for a split instant and you'll feel pretty mean. I reckon I'm not a man with no pull."

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears, almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown fell soft but distinct.

"I have a suggestion to make," he said, "but it seems a little confusing. I don't know this gentleman--but--but I think I know him. Now, you know him--you know him quite well--but you don't know him--naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know."

"I reckon the Cosmos is cracked," said Usher, and fell asprawl in his round office chair.

"Now, see here," vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and rational though still resounding. "I won't let you in. I want--"

“Who in hell are you?” yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.

“I think the gentleman’s name is Todd,” said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

“I fear you don’t read the Society papers properly,” he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, “‘Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city’s gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society’s scale.’ There’s been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim’s Pond tonight; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy-dress.”

“What man do you mean?”

“I mean the man with comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn’t you better go and investigate him? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry, when the convict with the gun hove in sight.”

“Do you seriously mean--” began the official.

“Why, look here, Mr Usher,” said Father Brown quietly, “you said the machine couldn’t make a mistake; and in one sense it didn’t. But the other machine did; the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy, because he was Lord Falconroy’s murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he is Lord Falconroy.”

“Then why the blazes didn’t he say so?” demanded the staring Usher.

“He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician,” replied the priest, “so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he was just going to tell it you, when”--and Father Brown looked down at his boots--“when a woman found another name for him.”

“But you can’t be so mad as to say,” said Greywood Usher, very white, “that Lord Falconroy was Drugger Davis.”

The priest looked at him very earnestly, but with a baffling and undecipherable face.

"I am not saying anything about it," he said. "I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But I think," he went on softly and reflectively, "I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy--even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening-dress; you know he's in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but--"

"Oh, stop it!" cried Greywood Usher, wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other's face.

"Don't stay talking to this lunatic!" cried Todd brutally. "Take me to my friend."

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

"I'm afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather," he said, "but this cutting may interest you."

Usher read the headlines, "Last-Trick's Strayed Revellers: Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim's Pond." The paragraph went on: "A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson's Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering-seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd's daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar deshabelle. She and the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary

joy-ride.”

Under the pink slip Mr Usher found a strip of a later paper, headed, “Astounding Escape of Millionaire’s Daughter with Convict. She had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now Safe in--”

Mr Greenwood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.



THE CLUB-FOOTED GROCER

By Arthur Conan Doyle

From The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Round the Fire Stories*

My uncle, Mr. Stephen Maple, had been at the same time the most successful and the least respectable of our family, so that we hardly knew whether to take credit for his wealth or to feel ashamed of his position. He had, as a matter of fact, established a large grocery in Stepney which did a curious mixed business, not always, as we had heard, of a very savoury character, with the riverside and seafaring people. He was ship’s chandler, provision merchant, and, if rumour spoke truly, some other things as well. Such a trade, however lucrative, had its drawbacks, as was evident when, after twenty years of prosperity, he was savagely assaulted by one of his customers and left for dead, with three smashed ribs and a broken leg, which mended so badly that it remained for ever three inches shorter than the other. This incident seemed, not unnaturally, to disgust him with his surroundings, for, after the trial, in which his assailant was condemned to fifteen years’ penal servitude, he retired from his business and settled in a lonely part of the North of England, whence, until that morning, we had never once heard of him—not even at the death of my father, who was his only brother.

My mother read his letter aloud to me: “If your son is with you, Ellen, and if he is as stout a lad as he promised for when last I heard from you, then send him up to me by the first train after this comes to hand. He will find that to serve me will pay him better than the engineering,

and if I pass away (though, thank God, there is no reason to complain as to my health) you will see that I have not forgotten my brother's son. Congleton is the station, and then a drive of four miles to Greta House, where I am now living. I will send a trap to meet the seven o'clock train, for it is the only one which stops here. Mind that you send him, Ellen, for I have very strong reasons for wishing him to be with me. Let bygones be bygones if there has been anything between us in the past. If you should fail me now you will live to regret it."

We were seated at either side of the breakfast table, looking blankly at each other and wondering what this might mean, when there came a ring at the bell, and the maid walked in with a telegram. It was from Uncle Stephen.

"On no account let John get out at Congleton," said the message. "He will find trap waiting seven o'clock evening train Stedding Bridge, one station further down line. Let him drive not me, but Garth Farm House—six miles. There will receive instructions. Do not fail; only you to look to."

"That is true enough," said my mother. "As far as I know, your uncle has not a friend in the world, nor has he ever deserved one. He has always been a hard man in his dealings, and he held back his money from your father at a time when a few pounds would have saved him from ruin. Why should I send my only son to serve him now?"

But my own inclinations were all for the adventure.

"If I have him for a friend, he can help me in my profession," I argued, taking my mother upon her weakest side.

"I have never known him to help any one yet," said she, bitterly. "And why all this mystery about getting out at a distant station and driving to the wrong address? He has got himself into some trouble and he wishes us to get him out of it. When he has used us he will throw us aside as he has done before. Your father might have been living now if he had only helped him."

But at last my arguments prevailed, for, as I pointed out, we had much to gain and little to lose, and why should we, the poorest members of a

family, go out of our way to offend the rich one? My bag was packed and my cab at the door, when there came a second telegram.

“Good shooting. Let John bring gun. Remember Stedding Bridge, not Congleton.” And so, with a gun-case added to my luggage and some surprise at my uncle’s insistence, I started off upon my adventure.

The journey lies over the main Northern Railway as far as the station of Carnfield, where one changes for the little branch line which winds over the fells. In all England there is no harsher or more impressive scenery. For two hours I passed through desolate rolling plains, rising at places into low, stone-littered hills, with long, straight outcrops of jagged rock showing upon their surface. Here and there little grey-roofed, grey-walled cottages huddled into villages, but for many miles at a time no house was visible nor any sign of life save the scattered sheep which wandered over the mountain sides. It was a depressing country, and my heart grew heavier and heavier as I neared my journey’s end, until at last the train pulled up at the little village of Stedding Bridge, where my uncle had told me to alight. A single ramshackle trap, with a country lout to drive it, was waiting at the station.

“Is this Mr. Stephen Maple’s?” I asked.

The fellow looked at me with eyes which were full of suspicion. “What is your name?” he asked, speaking a dialect which I will not attempt to reproduce.

“John Maple.”

“Anything to prove it?”

I half raised my hand, for my temper is none of the best, and then I reflected that the fellow was probably only carrying out the directions of my uncle. For answer I pointed to my name printed upon my gun-case.

“Yes, yes, that is right. It’s John Maple, sure enough!” said he, slowly spelling it out. “Get in, maister, for we have a bit of a drive before us.”

The road, white and shining, like all the roads in that limestone country, ran in long sweeps over the fells, with low walls of loose stone upon either side of it. The huge moors, mottled with sheep and with boulders, rolled away in gradually ascending curves to the misty sky-line. In one place a fall of the land gave a glimpse of a grey angle of distant sea. Bleak and sad and stern were all my surroundings, and I felt, under their influence, that this curious mission of mine was a more serious thing than it had appeared when viewed from London. This sudden call for help from an uncle whom I had never seen, and of whom I had heard little that was good, the urgency of it, his reference to my physical powers, the excuse by which he had ensured that I should bring a weapon, all hung together and pointed to some vague but sinister meaning. Things which appeared to be impossible in Kensington became very probable upon these wild and isolated hillsides. At last, oppressed with my own dark thoughts, I turned to my companion with the intention of asking some questions about my uncle, but the expression upon his face drove the idea from my head.

He was not looking at his old, unclipped chestnut horse, nor at the road along which he was driving, but his face was turned in my direction, and he was staring past me with an expression of curiosity and, as I thought, of apprehension. He raised the whip to lash the horse, and then dropped it again, as if convinced that it was useless. At the same time, following the direction of his gaze, I saw what it was which had excited him.

A man was running across the moor. He ran clumsily, stumbling and slipping among the stones; but the road curved, and it was easy for him to cut us off. As we came up to the spot for which he had been making, he scrambled over the stone wall and stood waiting, with the evening sun shining on his brown, clean-shaven face. He was a burly fellow, and in bad condition, for he stood with his hand on his ribs, panting and blowing after his short run. As we drove up I saw the glint of earrings in his ears.

“Say, mate, where are you bound for?” he asked, in a rough but good-humoured fashion.

“Farmer Purcell’s, at the Garth Farm,” said the driver.

“Sorry to stop you,” cried the other, standing aside; “I thought as I would hail you as you passed, for if so be as you had been going my way I should have made bold to ask you for a passage.”

His excuse was an absurd one, since it was evident that our little trap was as full as it could be, but my driver did not seem disposed to argue. He drove on without a word, and, looking back, I could see the stranger sitting by the roadside and cramming tobacco into his pipe.

“A sailor,” said I.

“Yes, maister. We’re not more than a few miles from Morecambe Bay,” the driver remarked.

“You seemed frightened of him,” I observed.

“Did I?” said he, drily; and then, after a long pause, “Maybe I was.” As to his reasons for fear, I could get nothing from him, and though I asked him many questions he was so stupid, or else so clever, that I could learn nothing from his replies. I observed, however, that from time to time he swept the moors with a troubled eye, but their huge brown expanse was unbroken by any moving figure. At last in a sort of cleft in the hills in front of us I saw a long, low-lying farm building, the centre of all those scattered flocks.

“Garth Farm,” said my driver. “There is Farmer Purcell himself,” he added, as a man strolled out of the porch and stood waiting for our arrival. He advanced as I descended from the trap, a hard, weather-worn fellow with light blue eyes, and hair and beard like sun-bleached grass. In his expression I read the same surly ill-will which I had already observed in my driver. Their malevolence could not be directed towards a complete stranger like myself, and so I began to suspect that my uncle was no more popular on the north-country fells than he had been in Stepney Highway.

“You’re to stay here until nightfall. That’s Mr. Stephen Maple’s wish,” said he, curtly. “You can have some tea and bacon if you like. It’s the best we can give you.”

I was very hungry, and accepted the hospitality in spite of the churlish

tone in which it was offered. The farmer's wife and his two daughters came into the sitting-room during the meal, and I was aware of a certain curiosity with which they regarded me. It may have been that a young man was a rarity in this wilderness, or it may be that my attempts at conversation won their goodwill, but they all three showed a kindliness in their manner. It was getting dark, so I remarked that it was time for me to be pushing on to Greta House.

"You've made up your mind to go, then?" said the older woman.

"Certainly. I have come all the way from London."

"There's no one hindering you from going back there."

"But I have come to see Mr. Maple, my uncle."

"Oh, well, no one can stop you if you want to go on," said the woman, and became silent as her husband entered the room.

With every fresh incident I felt that I was moving in an atmosphere of mystery and peril, and yet it was all so intangible and so vague that I could not guess where my danger lay. I should have asked the farmer's wife point-blank, but her surly husband seemed to divine the sympathy which she felt for me, and never again left us together. "It's time you were going, mister," said he at last, as his wife lit the lamp upon the table.

"Is the trap ready?"

"You'll need no trap. You'll walk," said he.

"How shall I know the way?"

"William will go with you."

William was the youth who had driven me up from the station. He was waiting at the door, and he shouldered my gun-case and bag. I stayed behind to thank the farmer for his hospitality, but he would have none of it. "I ask no thanks from Mr. Stephen Maple nor any friend of his," said he, bluntly. "I am paid for what I do. If I was not paid I would

not do it. Go your way, young man, and say no more.” He turned rudely on his heel and re-entered his house, slamming the door behind him.

It was quite dark outside, with heavy black clouds drifting slowly across the sky. Once clear of the farm inclosure and out on the moor I should have been hopelessly lost if it had not been for my guide, who walked in front of me along narrow sheep-tracks which were quite invisible to me. Every now and then, without seeing anything, we heard the clumsy scuffling of the creatures in the darkness. At first my guide walked swiftly and carelessly, but gradually his pace slowed down, until at last he was going very slowly and stealthily, like one who walks light-footed amid imminent menace. This vague, inexplicable sense of danger in the midst of the loneliness of that vast moor was more daunting than any evident peril could be, and I had begun to press him as to what it was that he feared, when suddenly he stopped and dragged me down among some gorse bushes which lined the path. His tug at my coat was so strenuous and imperative that I realized that the danger was a pressing one, and in an instant I was squatting down beside him as still as the bushes which shadowed us. It was so dark there that I could not even see the lad beside me.

It was a warm night, and a hot wind puffed in our faces. Suddenly in this wind there came something homely and familiar—the smell of burning tobacco. And then a face, illuminated by the glowing bowl of a pipe, came floating towards us. The man was all in shadow, but just that one dim halo of light with the face which filled it, brighter below and shading away into darkness above, stood out against the universal blackness. A thin, hungry face, thickly freckled with yellow over the cheek bones, blue, watery eyes, an ill-nourished, light-coloured moustache, a peaked yachting cap—that was all that I saw. He passed us, looking vacantly in front of him, and we heard the steps dying away along the path.

“Who was it?” I asked, as we rose to our feet.

“I don’t know.”

The fellow’s continual profession of ignorance made me angry.

“Why should you hide yourself, then?” I asked, sharply.

“Because Maister Maple told me. He said that I were to meet no one. If I met any one I should get no pay.”

“You met that sailor on the road?”

“Yes, and I think he was one of them.”

“One of whom?”

“One of the folk that have come on the fells. They are watchin’ Greta House, and Maister Maple is afeard of them. That’s why he wanted us to keep clear of them, and that’s why I’ve been a-trying to dodge ‘em.”

Here was something definite at last. Some body of men were threatening my uncle. The sailor was one of them. The man with the peaked cap—probably a sailor also—was another. I bethought me of Stepney Highway and of the murderous assault made upon my uncle there. Things were fitting themselves into a connected shape in my mind when a light twinkled over the fell, and my guide informed me that it was Greta. The place lay in a dip among the moors, so that one was very near it before one saw it. A short walk brought us up to the door.

I could see little of the building save that the lamp which shone through a small latticed window showed me dimly that it was both long and lofty. The low door under an overhanging lintel was loosely fitted, and light was bursting out on each side of it. The inmates of this lonely house appeared to be keenly on their guard, for they had heard our footsteps, and we were challenged before we reached the door.

“Who is there?” cried a deep-booming voice, and urgently, “Who is it, I say?”

“It’s me, Maister Maple. I have brought the gentleman.”

There was a sharp click, and a small wooden shutter flew open in the door. The gleam of a lantern shone upon us for a few seconds. Then the shutter closed again; with a great rasping of locks and clattering of bars, the door was opened, and I saw my uncle standing framed in that vivid yellow square cut out of the darkness.

He was a small, thick man, with a great rounded, bald head and one thin border of gingery curls. It was a fine head, the head of a thinker, but his large white face was heavy and commonplace, with a broad, loose-lipped mouth and two hanging dewlaps on either side of it. His eyes were small and restless, and his light-coloured lashes were continually moving. My mother had said once that they reminded her of the legs of a woodlouse, and I saw at the first glance what she meant. I heard also that in Stepney he had learned the language of his customers, and I blushed for our kinship as I listened to his villainous accent. "So, nephew," said he, holding out his hand. "Come in, come in, man, quick, and don't leave the door open. Your mother said you were grown a big lad, and, my word, she 'as a right to say so. 'Ere's a 'alf-crown for you, William, and you can go back again. Put the things down. 'Ere, Enoch, take Mr. John's things, and see that 'is supper is on the table."

As my uncle, after fastening the door, turned to show me into the sitting-room, I became aware of his most striking peculiarity. The injuries which he had received some years ago had, as I have already remarked, left one leg several inches shorter than the other. To atone for this he wore one of those enormous wooden soles to his boots which are prescribed by surgeons in such cases. He walked without a limp, but his tread on the stone flooring made a curious clack-click, clack-click, as the wood and the leather alternated. Whenever he moved it was to the rhythm of this singular castanet.

The great kitchen, with its huge fireplace and carved settle corners, showed that this dwelling was an old-time farmhouse. On one side of the room a line of boxes stood all corded and packed. The furniture was scant and plain, but on a trestle-table in the centre some supper, cold meat, bread, and a jug of beer was laid for me. An elderly manservant, as manifest a Cockney as his master, waited upon me, while my uncle, sitting in a comer, asked me many questions as to my mother and myself. When my meal was finished he ordered his man Enoch to unpack my gun. I observed that two other guns, old rusted weapons, were leaning against the wall beside the window.

"It's the window I'm afraid of," said my uncle, in the deep, reverberant voice which contrasted oddly with his plump little figure. "The door's safe against anything short of dynamite, but the window's a terror. Hi!

hi!" he yelled, "don't walk across the light! You can duck when you pass the lattice."

"For fear of being seen?" I asked.

"For fear of bein' shot, my lad. That's the trouble. Now, come an' sit beside me on the trestle 'ere, and I'll tell you all about it, for I can see that you are the right sort and can be trusted."

His flattery was clumsy and halting, and it was evident that he was very eager to conciliate me. I sat down beside him, and he drew a folded paper from his pocket. It was a _Western Morning News_, and the date was ten days before. The passage over which he pressed a long, black nail was concerned with the release from Dartmoor of a convict named Elias, whose term of sentence had been remitted on account of his defence of a warder who had been attacked in the quarries. The whole account was only a few lines long.

"Who is he, then?" I asked.

My uncle cocked his distorted foot into the air. "That's 'is mark!" said he. "'E was doin' time for that. How 'e's out an' after me again."

"But why should he be after you?"

"Because 'e wants to kill me. Because 'e'll never rest, the worrying devil, until 'e 'as 'ad 'is revenge on me. It's this way, nephew! I've no secrets from you. 'E thinks I've wronged 'im. For argument's sake we'll suppose I 'ave wronged 'im. And now 'im and 'is friends are after me."

"Who are his friends?"

My uncle's boom sank suddenly to a frightened whisper. "Sailors!" said he. "I knew they would come when I saw that 'ere paper, and two days ago I looked through that window and three of them was standin' lookin' at the 'ouse. It was after that that I wrote to your mother. They've marked me down, and they're waitin' for 'im."

"But why not send for the police?"

My uncle's eyes avoided mine.

"Police are no use," said he. "It's you that can help me."

"What can I do?"

"I'll tell you. I'm going to move. That's what all these boxes are for. Everything will soon be packed and ready. I 'ave friends at Leeds, and I shall be safer there. Not safe, mind you, but safer. I start to-morrow evening, and if you will stand by me until then I will make it worth your while. There's only Enoch and me to do everything, but we shall 'ave it all ready, I promise you, by to-morrow evening. The cart will be round then, and you and me and Enoch and the boy William can guard the things as far as Congleton station. Did you see anything of them on the fells?"

"Yes," said I; "a sailor stopped us on the way."

"Ah, I knew they were watching us. That was why I asked you to get out at the wrong station and to drive to Purcell's instead of comin' 'ere. We are blockaded—that's the word."

"And there was another," said I, "a man with a pipe."

"What was 'e like?"

"Thin face, freckles, a peaked——"

My uncle gave a hoarse scream.

"That's 'im! that's 'im! 'e's come! God be merciful to me, a sinner!" He went click-clacking about the room with his great foot like one distracted. There was something piteous and baby-like in that big bald head, and for the first time I felt a gush of pity for him.

"Come, uncle," said I, "you are living in a civilized land. There is a law that will bring these gentry to order. Let me drive over to the county police-station to-morrow morning and I'll soon set things right."

But he shook his head at me.

“E’s cunning and ‘e’s cruel,” said he. “I can’t draw a breath without thinking of him, cos ‘e buckled up three of my ribs. ‘E’ll kill me this time, sure. There’s only one chance. We must leave what we ‘ave not packed, and we must be off first thing to-morrow mornin’. Great God, what’s that!”

A tremendous knock upon the door had reverberated through the house and then another and another. An iron fist seemed to be beating upon it. My uncle collapsed into his chair. I seized a gun and ran to the door.

“Who’s there?” I shouted.

There was no answer.

I opened the shutter and looked out.

No one was there.

And then suddenly I saw that a long slip of paper was protruding through the slit of the door. I held it to the light. In rude but vigorous handwriting the message ran:—

“Put them out on the doorstep and save your skin.”

“What do they want?” I asked, as I read him the message.

“What they’ll never ‘ave! No, by the Lord, never!” he cried, with a fine burst of spirit. “‘Ere, Enoch! Enoch!”

The old fellow came running to the call.

“Enoch, I’ve been a good master to you all my life, and it’s your turn now. Will you take a risk for me?”

I thought better of my uncle when I saw how readily the man consented. Whomever else he had wronged, this one at least seemed to love him.

“Put your cloak on and your ‘at, Enoch, and out with you by the back

door. You know the way across the moor to the Purcells'. Tell them that I must 'ave the cart first thing in the mornin', and that Purcell must come with the shepherd as well. We must get clear of this or we are done. First thing in the mornin', Enoch, and ten pound for the job. Keep the black cloak on and move slow, and they will never see you. We'll keep the 'ouse till you come back."

It was a job for a brave man to venture out into the vague and invisible dangers of the fell, but the old servant took it as the most ordinary of messages. Picking his long, black cloak and his soft hat from the hook behind the door, he was ready on the instant. We extinguished the small lamp in the back passage, softly unbarred the back door, slipped him out, and barred it up again. Looking through the small hall window, I saw his black garments merge instantly into the night.

"It is but a few hours before the light comes, nephew," said my uncle, after he had tried all the bolts and bars. "You shall never regret this night's work. If we come through safely it will be the making of you. Stand by me till mornin', and I stand by you while there's breath in my body. The cart will be 'ere by five. What isn't ready we can afford to leave be'ind. We've only to load up and make for the early train at Congleton."

"Will they let us pass?"

"In broad daylight they dare not stop us. There will be six of us, if they all come, and three guns. We can fight our way through. Where can they get guns, common, wandering seamen? A pistol or two at the most. If we can keep them out for a few hours we are safe. Enoch must be 'alfway to Purcell's by now."

"But what do these sailors want?" I repeated. "You say yourself that you wronged them."

A look of mulish obstinacy came over his large, white face.

"Don't ask questions, nephew, and just do what I ask you," said he. "Enoch won't come back. 'E'll just bide there and come with the cart. 'Ark, what is that?"

A distant cry rang from out of the darkness, and then another one, short and sharp like the wail of the curlew.

“It’s Enoch!” said my uncle, gripping my arm. “They’re killin’ poor old Enoch.”

The cry came again, much nearer, and I heard the sound of hurrying steps and a shrill call for help.

“They are after ‘im!” cried my uncle, rushing to the front door. He picked up the lantern and flashed it through the little shutter. Up the yellow funnel of light a man was running frantically, his head bowed and a black cloak fluttering behind him. The moor seemed to be alive with dim pursuers.

“The bolt! The bolt!” gasped my uncle. He pushed it back whilst I turned the key, and we swung the door open to admit the fugitive. He dashed in and turned at once with a long yell of triumph. “Come on, lads! Tumble up, all hands, tumble up! Smartly there, all of you!”

It was so quickly and neatly done that we were taken by storm before we knew that we were attacked. The passage was full of rushing sailors. I slipped out of the clutch of one and ran for my gun, but it was only to crash down on to the stone floor an instant later with two of them holding on to me. They were so deft and quick that my hands were lashed together even while I struggled, and I was dragged into the settle corner, unhurt but very sore in spirit at the cunning with which our defences had been forced and the ease with which we had been overcome. They had not even troubled to bind my uncle, but he had been pushed into his chair, and the guns had been taken away. He sat with a very white face, his homely figure and absurd row of curls looking curiously out of place among the wild figures who surrounded him.

There were six of them, all evidently sailors. One I recognized as the man with the earrings whom I had already met upon the road that evening. They were all fine, weather-bronzed bewhiskered fellows. In the midst of them, leaning against the table, was the freckled man who had passed me on the moor. The great black cloak which poor Enoch had taken out with him was still hanging from his shoulders. He was of a very different type from the others—crafty, cruel, dangerous, with sly, thoughtful eyes

which gloated over my uncle. They suddenly turned themselves upon me and I never knew how one's skin can creep at a man's glance before.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Speak out, or we'll find a way to make you."

"I am Mr. Stephen Maple's nephew, come to visit him."

"You are, are you? Well, I wish you joy of your uncle and of your visit too. Quick's the word, lads, for we must be aboard before morning. What shall we do with the old 'un?"

"Trice him up Yankee fashion and give him six dozen," said one of the seamen.

"D'you hear, you cursed Cockney thief? We'll beat the life out of you if you don't give back what you've stolen. Where are they? I know you never parted with them."

My uncle pursed up his lips and shook his head, with a face in which his fear and his obstinacy contended.

"Won't tell, won't you? We'll see about that! Get him ready, Jim!"

One of the seamen seized my uncle, and pulled his coat and shirt over his shoulders. He sat lumped in his chair, his body all creased into white rolls which shivered with cold and with terror.

"Up with him to those hooks."

There were rows of them along the walls where the smoked meat used to be hung. The seamen tied my uncle by the wrists to two of these. Then one of them undid his leather belt.

"The buckle end, Jim," said the captain. "Give him the buckle."

"You cowards," I cried; "to beat an old man!"

"We'll beat a young one next," said he, with a malevolent glance at my corner. "Now, Jim, cut a wad out of him!"

“Give him one more chance!” cried one of the seamen.

“Aye, aye,” growled one or two others. “Give the swab a chance!”

“If you turn soft, you may give them up for ever,” said the captain.

“One thing or the other! You must lash it out of him; or you may give up what you took such pains to win and what would make you gentlemen for life—every man of you. There’s nothing else for it. Which shall it be?”

“Let him have it,” they cried, savagely.

“Then stand clear!” The buckle of the man’s belt whined savagely as he whirled it over his shoulder.

But my uncle cried out before the blow fell.

“I can’t stand it!” he cried. “Let me down!”

“Where are they, then?”

“I’ll show you if you’ll let me down.”

They cast off the handkerchiefs and he pulled his coat over his fat, round shoulders. The seamen stood round him, the most intense curiosity and excitement upon their swarthy faces.

“No gammon!” cried the man with the freckles. “We’ll kill you joint by joint if you try to fool us. Now then! Where are they?”

“In my bedroom.”

“Where is that?”

“The room above.”

“Whereabouts?”

“In the corner of the oak ark by the bed.”

The seamen all rushed to the stair, but the captain called them back.

“We don’t leave this cunning old fox behind us. Ha, your face drops at that, does it? By the Lord, I believe you are trying to slip your anchor. Here, lads, make him fast and take him along!”

With a confused trampling of feet they rushed up the stairs, dragging my uncle in the midst of them. For an instant I was alone. My hands were tied but not my feet. If I could find my way across the moor I might rouse the police and intercept these rascals before they could reach the sea. For a moment I hesitated as to whether I should leave my uncle alone in such a plight. But I should be of more service to him—or, at the worst, to his property—if I went than if I stayed. I rushed to the hall door, and as I reached it I heard a yell above my head, a shattering, splintering noise, and then amid a chorus of shouts a huge weight fell with a horrible thud at my very feet. Never while I live will that squelching thud pass out of my ears. And there, just in front of me, in the lane of light cast by the open door, lay my unhappy uncle, his bald head twisted on to one shoulder, like the wrung neck of a chicken. It needed but a glance to see that his spine was broken and that he was dead.

The gang of seamen had rushed downstairs so quickly that they were clustered at the door and crowding all round me almost as soon as I had realized what had occurred.

“It’s no doing of ours, mate,” said one of them to me. “He hove himself through the window, and that’s the truth. Don’t you put it down to us.”

“He thought he could get to windward of us if once he was out in the dark, you see,” said another. “But he came head foremost and broke his bloomin’ neck.”

“And a blessed good job too!” cried the chief, with a savage oath. “I’d have done it for him if he hadn’t took the lead. Don’t make any mistake, my lads, this is murder, and we’re all in it, together. There’s only one way out of it, and that is to hang together, unless, as the saying goes, you mean to hang apart. There’s only one witness——”

He looked at me with his malicious little eyes, and I saw that he had something that gleamed—either a knife or a revolver—in the breast of his

pea-jacket. Two of the men slipped between us.

“Stow that, Captain Elias,” said one of them. “If this old man met his end it is through no fault of ours. The worst we ever meant him was to take some of the skin off his back. But as to this young fellow, we have no quarrel with him——”

“You fool, you may have no quarrel with him, but he has his quarrel with you. He’ll swear your life away if you don’t silence his tongue. It’s his life or ours, and don’t you make any mistake.”

“Aye, aye, the skipper has the longest head of any of us. Better do what he tells you,” cried another.

But my champion, who was the fellow with the earrings, covered me with his own broad chest and swore roundly that no one should lay a finger on me. The others were equally divided, and my fate might have been the cause of a quarrel between them when suddenly the captain gave a cry of delight and amazement which was taken up by the whole gang. I followed their eyes and outstretched fingers, and this was what I saw.

My uncle was lying with his legs outstretched, and the club foot was that which was furthest from us. All round this foot a dozen brilliant objects were twinkling and flashing in the yellow light which streamed from the open door. The captain caught up the lantern and held it to the place. The huge sole of his boot had been shattered in the fall, and it was clear now that it had been a hollow box in which he stowed his valuables, for the path was all sprinkled with precious stones. Three which I saw were of an unusual size, and as many as forty, I should think, of fair value. The seamen had cast themselves down and were greedily gathering them up, when my friend with the earrings plucked me by the sleeve.

“Here’s your chance, mate,” he whispered. “Off you go before worse comes of it.”

It was a timely hint, and it did not take me long to act upon it. A few cautious steps and I had passed unobserved beyond the circle of light. Then I set off running, falling and rising and falling again, for no one who has not tried it can tell how hard it is to run over uneven ground

with hands which are fastened together. I ran and ran, until for want of breath I could no longer put one foot before the other. But I need not have hurried so, for when I had gone a long way I stopped at last to breathe, and, looking back, I could still see the gleam of the lantern far away, and the outline of the seamen who squatted round it. Then at last this single point of light went suddenly out, and the whole great moor was left in the thickest darkness.

So deftly was I tied, that it took me a long half-hour and a broken tooth before I got my hands free. My idea was to make my way across to the Purcells' farm, but north was the same as south under that pitchy sky, and for hours I wandered among the rustling, scuttling sheep without any certainty as to where I was going. When at last there came a glimmer in the east, and the undulating fells, grey with the morning mist, rolled once more to the horizon, I recognized that I was close by Purcell's farm, and there a little in front of me I was startled to see another man walking in the same direction. At first I approached him warily, but before I overtook him I knew by the bent back and tottering step that it was Enoch, the old servant, and right glad I was to see that he was living. He had been knocked down, beaten, and his cloak and hat taken away by these ruffians, and all night he had wandered in the darkness, like myself, in search of help. He burst into tears when I told him of his master's death, and sat hiccupping with the hard, dry sobs of an old man among the stones upon the moor.

"It's the men of the _Black Mogul_," he said. "Yes, yes, I knew that they would be the end of 'im."

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Well, well, you are one of 'is own folk," said he. "'E 'as passed away; yes, yes, it is all over and done. I can tell you about it, no man better, but mum's the word with old Enoch unless master wants 'im to speak. But his own nephew who came to 'elp 'im in the hour of need—yes, yes, Mister John, you ought to know.

"It was like this, sir. Your uncle 'ad 'is grocer's business at Stepney, but 'e 'ad another business also. 'E would buy as well as sell, and when 'e bought 'e never asked no questions where the stuff came from. Why should 'e? It wasn't no business of 'is, was it? If folk brought him a

stone or a silver plate, what was it to 'im where they got it? That's good sense, and it ought to be good law, as I 'old. Any'ow, it was good enough for us at Stepney.

"Well, there was a steamer came from South Africa what foundered at sea. At least, they say so, and Lloyd's paid the money. She 'ad some very fine diamonds invoiced as being aboard of 'er. Soon after there came the brig Black Mogul into the port o' London, with 'er papers all right as 'avin' cleared from Port Elizabeth with a cargo of 'ides. The captain, which 'is name was Elias, 'e came to see the master, and what d'you think that 'e 'ad to sell? Why, sir, as I'm a livin' sinner 'e 'ad a packet of diamonds for all the world just the same as what was lost out o' that there African steamer. 'Ow did 'e get them? I don't know. Master didn't know. 'E didn't seek to know either. The captain 'e was anxious for reasons of 'is own to get them safe, so 'e gave them to master, same as you might put a thing in a bank. But master 'e'd 'ad time to get fond of them, and 'e wasn't over satisfied as to where the Black Mogul 'ad been tradin', or where her captain 'ad got the stones, so when 'e come back for them the master 'e said as 'e thought they were best in 'is own 'ands. Mind I don't 'old with it myself, but that was what master said to Captain Elias in the little back parlour at Stepney. That was 'ow 'e got 'is leg broke and three of his ribs.

"So the captain got juggled for that, and the master, when 'e was able to get about, thought that 'e would 'ave peace for fifteen years, and 'e came away from London because 'e was afraid of the sailor men; but, at the end of five years, the captain was out and after 'im, with as many of 'is crew as 'e could gather. Send for the perlice, you says! Well, there are two sides to that, and the master 'e wasn't much more fond of the perlice than Elias was. But they fair 'emmed master in, as you 'ave seen for yourself, and they bested 'im at last, and the loneliness that 'e thought would be 'is safety 'as proved 'is ruin. Well, well, 'e was 'ard to many, but a good master to me, and it's long before I come on such another."

One word in conclusion. A strange cutter, which had been hanging about the coast, was seen to beat down the Irish Sea that morning, and it is conjectured that Elias and his men were on board of it. At any rate, nothing has been heard of them since. It was shown at the inquest that my uncle had lived in a sordid fashion for years, and he left little

behind him. The mere knowledge that he possessed this treasure, which he carried about with him in so extraordinary a fashion, had appeared to be the joy of his life, and he had never, as far as we could learn, tried to realize any of his diamonds. So his disreputable name when living was not atoned for by any posthumous benevolence, and the family, equally scandalized by his life and by his death, have finally buried all memory of the club-footed grocer of Stepney.



THE VICAR-GENERAL

by Francis Clement Kelley

From The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The City and the World and Other Stories*

The Vicar-General was dead. With his long, white hair smoothed back, he lay upon a silk pillow, his hands clasped over a chalice upon his breast. He was clad in priestly vestments; and he looked, as he lay in his coffin before the great altar with the candles burning on it, as if he were just ready to arise and begin a new _"Introibo"_ in Heaven. The bells of the church wherein the Vicar-General lay asleep had called his people all the morning in a sad and solemn tolling. The people had come, as sad and solemn as the bells. They were gathered about the bier of their pastor. Priests from far and near had chanted the Office of the Dead; the Requiem Mass was over, and the venerable chief of the diocese, the Bishop himself, stood in cope and mitre, to give the last Absolution.

[Illustration: "The Bishop himself stood in cope and mitre to give the last absolution."]

The Bishop had loved the Vicar-General--had loved him as a brother. For was it not the Vicar-General who had bidden His Lordship welcome, when he came from his distant parish to take up the cares of a diocese. With all the timidity of a stranger, the Bishop had feared; but the Vicar-General guided his steps safely and well. Now the

Bishop, gazing at the white, venerable face, remembered--and wept. In the midst of the Absolution, his voice broke. Priests bit their lips, as their eyes filled with hot tears; but the Sisters who taught in the parochial school and their little charges, did not attempt to keep back their sobs. For others than the Bishop loved the Vicar-General.

There was one standing by the coffin, whom neither the Bishop, priests nor people saw. It was the Vicar-General, himself. He still wore his priestly vestments. Was he not a priest forever? His arms were folded and his face was troubled. He knew every one present; but none of them knew that he was so near. He scanned the lines of the Bishop's face and seemed to wonder at his tears. He was quite unmoved by the sorrow around him, did not seem to care at all. Yet in life the Vicar-General had cared much about the feelings of others toward him. His eyes wandered over the great congregation and rested on the children, but without tenderness in them. This, too, was very unlike the Vicar-General. Then the eyes came back and rested on the priestly form in the coffin, and the trouble of them increased.

The Absolution was over and the coffin was closed when the Vicar-General looked up again, and knew that Another Unseen besides himself was present. The Other was looking over the coffin at the Vicar-General; looking steadily, with eyes that searched down deep and with lashes that were very, very still. He wore a long robe of some texture the Vicar-General had never seen in life. It shimmered like silk, shone like gold, and sparkled as if dusted with tiny diamonds. The hair of the Other was long, and fell, bright and beautiful, over his shoulders. His face seemed to shine out of it, like a jewel in a gold setting. His limbs seemed strong and manly in spite of his beardless face. The Vicar-General noticed what seemed like wings behind him; but they were not wings, only something which gave the impression of them. The Vicar-General could not remove his eyes from the Other. Gradually he knew that he was gazing at an Angel, and an Angel who had intimate relation to himself.

The body was borne out of the church. The Angel moved to follow, and the Vicar-General knew that he also had to go. The day was perfect, for it was in the full glory of the summer; but the Vicar-General noticed little of either the day or the gathering. The Angel did not speak, but his eyes said "come": and so the Vicar-General

followed--whither, he did not know.

The Vicar-General was not sure that it was even a place to which the Angel led him; but he felt with increasing trouble that he was to be the center of some momentous event. There were people arriving, most of whom the Vicar-General knew--men and women of his flock, to whom he had ministered and many of whom he had seen die. They all smiled at the Vicar-General as they passed, and ranged themselves on one side. The Silent Angel stood very close to the Vicar-General. As the people came near, the priest felt his vestments grow light upon him, as if they were lifting him in the air. They shone very brightly, too, and took on a new beauty. The Vicar-General felt glad that he was wearing them.

The Silent Angel looked at him, but spoke not a word; yet the Vicar-General understood at once, knew that he was to answer at a stern trial, and that these were his witnesses--the souls of the people to whom he ministered, to whom he had broken the Bread of Life. How many there were! They gladdened the Vicar-General's heart. There were his converts, the children he had baptized, his penitents, the pure virgins whose vows he had consecrated to God, the youths whom his example had won to the altar. They were all there. The Vicar-General counted them, and he could not think of a single one missing.

On the other side, witnesses began to arrive and the Vicar-General's look of trouble returned. He felt his priestly vestments becoming heavy. Especially did he feel the weight of the amice, which was like a heavy iron helmet crushed down over his shoulders. The cincture was binding him very tightly. He felt that he could scarcely move for it. The maniple rendered his left arm almost powerless. The stole was pulling at him, and the weight of the chasuble made him very faint.

He knew some of the witnesses, but only a few. He had seen these few before. They were his neglected spiritual children. He remembered each and every case. One was a missed sick-call: his had been the fault. Another was a man driven from the church by a harsh word spoken in anger. The Vicar-General remembered the day when he referred to this man in his sermon and saw him arise in his pew and leave. He did not return. Another was a priest--his own assistant. The Vicar-General had no patience with his weaknesses. From disgust at them his feelings had

turned to rancor against the man--and the assistant was lost. The Vicar-General trembled; for these things he had passed by as either justified by reason of the severity necessary to his office, or as wiped out by his virtues--and he had many virtues.

The Vicar-General's eyes sought those of the Silent Angel, and he lost some of his fear, while the weight of his vestments became a little lighter. But the Silent Angel's gaze caused the Vicar-General again to look at the witnesses. Those against him were increasing. The faces of the new-comers he did not know. The Vicar-General felt like protesting that there must be some mistake, for the new-comers were red men, brown men, yellow men and black men, besides white men whose faces were altogether strange. He was sure none of these had ever been in his parish. The new-comers were dressed in the garbs of every nation under the sun. They all alike looked very sternly at the Vicar-General, so that he could not bear their glances. Still he could not understand how he had ever offended against them, nor could he surmise why they should be witnesses to his hurt.

The Silent Angel still stood beside the Vicar-General; but the troubled soul of the priest could find no enlightenment in his eyes. All the while witnesses kept arriving and the multitude of them filled him with a great terror.

At last he saw a face amongst the strangers which he thought familiar, and he began to understand. It was the face of a priest he had known, who had been in the same diocese, somewhat under the Vicar-General's authority. On earth this priest had been one of the quiet kind, without ambition except to serve in a very humble way. He had always been in a parish so poor and small, that the priest himself had in his manner, his bearing, even his clothes, reflected its humility and its poverty. The Vicar-General remembered that the priest had once come to him as a matter of conscience to say that, while he was not complaining, nevertheless he really needed help and counsel. He said that his scattered flock was being lost for the want of things which could not be supplied out of its poverty. He told the Vicar-General what was needed. The Vicar-General remembered that he had agreed with him; but had informed him very gently that it was the policy of the diocese to let each parish maintain and support itself. The Vicar-General had felt justified in refusing his aid, especially

since, at that time, he was collecting for a new organ for his own church, one with three banks of keys--the old one had but two. The Vicar-General now knew that his slight feeling of worry at the time was not groundless; but while then he had felt vaguely that he was wrong in his position, now he was certain of error. His eyes sought all through his own witnesses, but they found no likelihood of a testimony in his favor based on the purchase of that grand organ. Then it all came to the Vicar-General, from the eyes of the Silent Angel, that he had received on earth all the reward that was due to him for it.

The presence of the men of all colors and of strange garbs was still a mystery to the Vicar-General; but at last he saw among them a bent old priest with a long beard and a crucifix in his girdle. At once the Vicar-General recognized him and his heart sank. Too well he remembered the poor missionary who had begged for assistance: money, a letter, a recommendation--anything; and had faced the inflexible official for half an hour during his pleading. The Vicar-General had felt at that time, as he felt when his poor diocesan brother had come to him, that there was so much to be done at home, absolutely nothing could be sent out. There was the Orphanage which the Bishop was building and they were just beginning to gather funds for a new Cathedral. The Bishop had acquiesced in the Vicar-General's ruling. The diocese had flourished and had grown strong. The Vicar-General had always been its pride. He was humbled now under the gaze of the Silent Angel, whose eyes told him wherein he had been at fault. He knew that the fault was not in the building of the great and beautiful things, which of themselves were good because they were for God's glory; but rather was it in this: that he had shut out of his heart, for their sakes, the cry of affliction and the call of pleading voices from the near and far begging but for the crumbs which meant to them Faith here and Life hereafter.

Now, O God! there were the red men, the brown men, the yellow men and the black men; not to speak of these white men whose faces were so strange; and they were going to say something--something against him. He could guess--could well guess what it was they would say. The Vicar-General knew that he had been wrong, and that his wrong had come into Eternity. He doubted if it ever could be made right, for he knew now the value of a soul even in a black body. He knew it, but was it

too late? His vestments were as heavy as lead.

Trembling in every limb, the Vicar-General looked for his Judge; but he could not see Him. He only felt His Presence. The Silent Angel had a book in his hand. The Vicar-General could read its title. There was a chalice on the cover, as if it spoke of priests, and under it he read:

THE LAW BY WHICH THEY SHALL BE JUDGED.

The Silent Angel opened the book and the Vicar-General saw that it had but one page. Shining out from the page he read:

"THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER."

And under it:

"GO YE, THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS."

Sorrow was over the soul of the priest. Only the hope in the eyes of the Silent Angel gave him hope, as he bowed his head before the judgment.



船房夜話 (Nautilus)

From: あめりか物語 (Amerika Monogatari)

Author: 永井荷風 (Kafu Nagai)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/35327/35327-h/35327-h.htm>

何處いづこにしても陸を見る事の出来ない航海は、殆ど堪へ難い程無聊ぶれうに苦しめられるものであるが、横濱から亞米利加あめりかの新開地シアトルの港へ通ふ航海、此れもその一ツであらう。

No matter where you go, anywhere you can not see the voyage of the voyage that can not afford to be too hard to be badly stolen,

Let me introduce Ami...

出帆した日、故國の山影に別れたなら、船客は彼岸の大陸に達する其の日まで、半月あまりの間、一つの島、一つの山をも見る事は出来ない。昨日も海、今日も海――何時見ても變らぬ太平洋の眺望ながめと云ふのは唯だ茫漠として、大きな波浪なみの起伏する邊に翼の長い嘴くちばしの曲つた灰色の信天翁あはうどりの飛び廻つてゐるばかりである。その上にも天氣は次第に北の方へと進むに連れて心地よく晴れ渡る事は稀になり、まづ毎日のやうに空は暗澹たる鼠色の雲に蔽ひ盡さるゝのみか動やゝもすれば雨か又は霧になつて了ふ。

私は圖らずも此淋しい海の上の旅人になつた。そして早くも十日ばかりの日數を送り得た處である。晝間ならば甲板で環投わなげの遊び、若しくは喫煙室で骨牌かるたを取りなぞして、どうか斯うか時間を消費する事が出来るけれど、さて晚餐の食卓テーブルを離れてからの夜になると、殆ど爲す事が無くなつて了ふ。且つ今日あたりは餘程氣候も寒くなつて來たやうだ。外套なしではとても甲板を歩いて喫煙室へも行かれまいと思ふ所から、私は其の儘船房キヤビンに閉じ籠つて、日本から持つて來た雑誌でも開かうかと思つて居ると、其の時室の戸を指先でコト / \ と軽く叩くものがある。

「お這入んなさい。」と私は半身を起しながら呼掛けた。

戸が開いて、「どうした。又少し動くやうぢや無いか。弱つとるのかね。

」

「寒いから引込んで了つた。まア掛け給へ。」と云ふと、

「全く寒いな。アラスカの沖を通るんだと云ふからな。」と餘り濃くない髯を生やした口許に微笑を浮かべながら、長椅子ソフワの片隅へ腰を下したのは柳田君と云つて航海中懇意になつた紳士である。

中肉中丈、年は三十を一つ二つも越して居るらしい。縞地しまぢの背廣の上に褐色ちやいろの外套を纏ひ、高い襟カラーの間からは華美はでな色の襟飾ネキタイを見せて居る。何處となく氣取つた様子で膝の上に片脚を載せ、指輪を穿めた小指の先で葉巻シガーの灰を拂ひ落しながら、

「日本なら今頃は随分好い時候なんだがな……………」

「さう、全くだよ。」

「何か思ひ出す事でもありやしないかね。」

「はゝは。其ア君お隣りの先生へ云ふ事だ。」

「うむ。お隣りの先生と云へば如何して居る。又例の如く引込んで居るんだらう。呼んで見やうぢや無いか。」

「よからう。」と私は壁をトン／＼と二三度叩いて見た。少時しばらくは答へが無かつたが、聴て隣りの船房に居る岸本君と云ふのが、私の船室の戸口へ顔を出した。

「ハロオ、カムイン。」とハイカラの柳田君は早速氣取つた發音で呼掛けると、

「有難う。此様風をして居るですから……。」と岸本君は其の儘佇立んで居る。

「さ、這入り給へ。」と私は長椅子から立つて立掛けてある疊椅子を廣げた。

岸本君と云ふのは矢張三十近くの稍身丈せいの低い男で、紬の袷とフランクネルの一重を重着かさねぎした上に大島の羽織を被つて居る。

「ぢや、失禮します。」と鳥渡腰を屈めて椅子に坐りながら、「洋服はどうも寒くて不可んですから、寢衣ねまきで寢やうかと思つて居たです。」

すると柳田君は、岸本君の顔を見ながら、

「洋服は寒いですか。」と如何にも不審だと云ふ語調で、「私なんぞは、然うすると全く反對ですね。増して此様航海中なんか日本服を着やうものなら、襟首が寒くて忽ち風邪を引いて了ふです。」

「さうですかなア。其れぢやア、私は未だ洋服に慣れ無いんですな。」

「柳田君、君は飲いける口なんだから、どうです、命じませうか。」

「いや、今夜は餘り欲しくは無いです。唯だ退屈だから談話はなしに遣つて來たです。」

「だから、話をするには矢張やつぱりコツプが無いと面白くないでせう。」と私は鈴ベルを押しながら、「又例の氣焰を聞かうぢやありませんか。ねえ、岸本君。」

然し岸本君は返事をせず傾けた顔を起して、「又、大分動いてゐる様ですね。」

「君。何にしても太平洋だよ。」と柳田君は再び薄い髭ひげを拵ひねつた。ボーイが戸を開ける。

「柳田君、君は例の如くウヰスキーですか。」

「勿論オフコース」と云ふ返事を聞いてボーイは靜に戸を閉めて立去つたが、其の時呖るやうな太い汽笛の響に續いて、甲板へ打上げる波の音がした。

「成程、少し動搖するね。まア可いさ。今夜は一ツ愉快的な雜談會を催したいもんだな。」と柳田君は安樂さうに足を踏み伸したが、和服の岸本君は明い電氣燈の輝ひかつて居る室の天井を見廻しながら、

「どうしたんです。非常に汽笛を鳴らずぢやありませんか。」

「霧が深いからでせう。」と柳田君が説明し掛けた時ボーイは命じた酒類を盆にのせて持運んで來た。そしてベッドの傍の小さいテーブルの上に置きコップへついで後再び室を出て行く。

「グッドラック。」と柳田君が第一にコップをさゝげたので、私等も同じやうに笑ひながらグッドラックを繰返した。

何時になつたのか遙に時間を知らせる淋しい鐘の音が聞える。波は折から次第に高まり行くと見え、今はベッドの上の丸い船窓へ凄じく打寄せる響がすると、甲板の方に當つて高い檣ほばしらを掠める風の音が、丁度東京で云ふ二月のカラ風を聞くやうで、其れに連れては何處とも知らずギイ／＼と何か物の軋きしむ響も聞え始めた。然し私等は最早や航海には馴れて了つた處から別に酔ふやうな虞うれひは無い。窓や戸へ帷幕カーテンを引き蒸氣スチームの溫度で狭い船室の中を暖かにして、安樂椅子へ凭れながら外部おもての暴風雨を聞いてみると、却つてそれとも無しに冬の夜に於ける爐邊の愉快が思ひ出される。ハイカラの柳田君も同じ感情に誘はれたのであらう、ウヰスキーの洋盞さかづきを下に置いて、

「ねえ、君。自分の身體が安全だと云ふ事を信じて居ると、外を吹いて居る暴風雨ストームと云ふものは、何となしに趣味のあるやうに聞えるですな。」

「眞實、これが大船に乗つた心持と云ふのでせうな。然し若しか、帆前船見たやうなものだつたら、如何でせう。随分難船しないとも云へませんぜ。」と岸本君は眞面目らしく云つた。

「何事に寄らず皆な然うですよ。一方で愉快を感じるものがあれば、其の爲めに一方では屹度苦痛を感じるものが起るです。火事なんぞは焼かれるものこそ災難だが、外のものには三國一の見物だからね。」とウヰスキーの酔が廻つたのか、私は何か分らぬ屁理窟を云ふと、

「眞理だよ、實際眞理だよ。」と柳田君は深くも何か感じたらしい様子になつて、「君の比喻に従ふと、僕なんぞは正に焼出された方の組なんだな。焼出されて亞米利加三界へ逃げ出すんだ。僕は實際去年日本へ歸つたばかりなんだ、行李トランクを開けるか開けない中、又候またぞろ海外へ行かうなぞとは、全く自分でも意外な心持がするです。」

私も岸本君もとも／＼熱心に柳田君が今回の渡米に付いての抱負を質問した。鳥渡した話にも柳田君は必ず大陸の文明島國の狹小と云ふ事を口癖のやうにしてゐるので、定めし大抱負を持つて居る事と想像したからである。

「はゝゝは。其様抱負なぞと云ふ大したものはいです。しかし、、、.....」と濃くない髭を拵ひねつて柳田君は自家の経歴を述べ始めた。

彼は最初或學校を卒業した後、直様會社員となつて、意氣揚々と濠洲の地へ赴いたのである。そして久振に故郷の日本へ歸つて來たが、満々たる胸中の得意と云ふものは、最初出立した時の比ではない。舊友の歡迎會を始めとして、彼は到る所逢ふ人毎に大陸の文明と世界の商況とを説き且つ賞讃した。豆粒のやうな小な島國の社會は必ず自分を重く用ひてくれるに違ひ無いと深く信じて疑はなかつた。處が事實は本社詰めの翻譯掛にされて了つて、其の月給幾何かと問へば、本位ほんゐの低い日本銀貨の僅か四十圓と云ふのであつた。然し彼はよく／＼日本の事情を考へて、先づ黙して此れを受取つたものゝ、胸中には絶えず不平が蟠わだかまり易い。で、此の不平を慰むべく、彼は臆て才色優れた貴族の令嬢をでも妻にしようと、大に此の方面へ運動しはじめた。心中では洋行歸り――と云ふ此の呼聲が確に世の娘や母親の心を惹くであらうと信じたが事實は増々反對して來る。彼が目掛けた或子爵の令嬢と云ふのは彼が最も冷笑する島國の大學卒業生と結婚して了つた。彼は二度まで得意の鼻を折られたばかりでは無く、今度は確に遣瀨なき失戀の打撃をも蒙つたのだ。

然し柳田君は猶全く絶望して了ひはせぬ。苦痛の反動として以前よりも一層過激に島國の天地を罵倒し始めた。そして再び海外へ旅の愉快を試みやうと決心したのである。

「日本なんかに居つたら、到底心の底から快哉を呼ぶやうな事アありやせんからね。丁度好鹽梅いゝあんばいに横濱の生糸商で亞米利加へ視察に行つてくれと云ふものがあるから、此れ幸ひに依頼されて出掛けて來たです

。事業ビジネスと云ふ事に付いちや、如何しても海外へ行かなければいかんですからね。僕は同胞諸君が渡米されるのを見ると、實際嬉しく思ふです。」と洋盞さかづきを取つて咽喉を潤したが、身體の方向むきを一轉させて、「岸本君。君は米國あつちに行つてから學校へ這入るとか云はれたですね。」

「さうです。」と岸本君は和服の襟を引合せた。

「大學へでも這入られるですか。」

「さ。其の心算ですが、今の處ぢや全で語學が出来ませんし、未だ事情も分らんですからね……」

「柳田君。岸本君は細君や子供までを残して學問に出て來られたのださうです。」と私が云ひ添へると、柳田君は身體を前へ進ませながら、

「岸本君。君はもうお子様があるんですか。」

「えゝ。」とばかり岸本君は稍其の頬を赤らめた。

「其れぢや、非常な大決心を以つて出て來られたのですな。」

「まア、此れまでにして、出て來るには随分奮發したつもりなんです。親類なぞには激きびしく止るものも有りました。」と今度は岸本君が語る可き順序となつた。

此の人は矢張東京の或會社に雇はれて居たが、將來に出世する見込のないばかりか、何時も人の後に蹴落されてのみ居た、と云ふのは、畢竟ひつきやう何處の學校をも卒業した事がない。乃すなはち肩書と云ふものを有つてゐない其の爲めであると、つく／＼考へ始めた折から、今度社内の改革に遇つて解雇される事となつた。けれども幸ひ其の細君の身には尠からぬ財産が付いて居たので、普通の人の遭遇するやうな憂目を見ずに濟んだのである。否、其の細君は寧ろ好い折であると云ふ様に、此様喧しい東京に居るよりか、自分の身に付いて居る財産で何處か靜な田舎へ行き可愛い子供の三人暮しで安樂に暮した方がと云出した。

けれども、岸本君は此の優しい妻の語に従ふどころでは無い。細君が其の亡父から譲られた財産で、自分は出来る事なら一年なり二年なり米國へ行つて學問して來たいと相談し掛けた。すると細君は決して金を惜む爲めでは無く、唯だ／＼愛する夫に別れるのが可厭いやさに堅く其れには反對したのである。無理な出世なぞはしてくれなくてもよい。書生上りの學士さんに先を越されても少しも耻る事は無い。人は其の力相應の働きをして平和に其の日が送れさへすればよいでは無いかと云ふのが細君の意見であつ

たが、是非飽くまでもと云ふ夫の決心に到頭細君も涙ながらに岸本君を萬里の異郷に出立させる事になつたと云ふのである。

「ですから、私の考へでは成りたけ時間を短くして何なり學校の免狀を持つて歸りたいと思つて居るです。卒業免狀が妻へ見せる一番の土産なんですから。」

云ひ了つて、岸本君は自ら勇氣を勵ます爲めか、苦味にがさうな顔をしながらも、グツと一口ウキスキーを飲干した。

「うむ。全くお察し申すです。然し其れと共に僕は満腔の熱情を以て君の莊舉を祝するです。」と柳田君は續いてコップを上げたが又調子を變へて、「然し、何かにつけて思ひ出しなさるでせうな。僕は未だ細君の味は知らないですがね。」

「はゝゝは。もう此處まで踏出して其様意氣地のない事が……はゝゝは。」と殊更に笑つたが其の様子は如何にも苦し氣に見受けられた。

カン／＼と折から又もや鐘を打つ音が聞えた。硝子戸一枚で僅に境されてある船窓まどの外には依然として波と風とが荒れ廻つて居たが、閉切つた船房へやの中は酒の香氣かをりと煙草の煙にもう暖か過る程になつて居る。いつか談話にも疲れ掛けた私達は船房中に輝き渡る電燈の光を今更の様に眺め廻した。柳田君は臆て思出したやうに時計を引出して、

「もう十一時だ。」

「さうですか。大變お邪魔をしました。其れぢやアそろ／＼お暇ませう。」と岸本君が先に座を立つた。

「まア可いぢやありませんか。」

「有難う。今夜はお庇かげで非常に愉快だつたです。明日も又恁かう云ふ風に送りたいですな。其れぢや……。」と戸を開けて「グツドナイト。」と柳田君は何か分らぬ英詩を口の中で唱ひながら早や己が船房の方へと、次第に其の聲音を遠くさせると、隣りの室では同じく歸り去つた岸本君が淋しい寢床に其の身を横へるのであらう、ベッドの帳帷カーテンを引き寄せる音が幽に聞えた。

(明治卅六年十一月)



A POETESS

By Mary E. Wilkins

From Internet Archive's *A New England Nun And Other Stories*

THE garden-patch at the right of the house was all a gay spangle with sweet-peas and red-flowering beans, and flanked with feathery asparagus. A woman in blue was moving about there. Another woman, in a black bonnet, stood at the front door of the house. She knocked and waited. She could not see from where she stood the blue-clad woman in the garden. The house was very close to the road, from which a tall evergreen hedge separated it, and the view to the side was in a measure cut off.

The front door was open ; the woman had to reach to knock on it, as it swung into the entry. She was a small woman and quite young, with a bright alertness about her which had almost the effect of prettiness. It was to her what greenness and crispness are to a plant. She poked her little face forward, and her sharp pretty eyes took in the entry and a room at the left, of which the door stood open. The entry was small and square and unfurnished, except for a well-rubbed old card-table against the back wall. The room was full of green light from the tall hedge, and bristling with grasses and flowers and asparagus stalks.

" Betsey, you there ?" called the woman. When she spoke, a yellow canary, whose cage hung beside the front door, began to chirp and twitter.

"Betsey, you there?" the woman called again. The bird's chirps came in a quick volley ; then he began to trill and sing.

" She ain't there," said the woman. She turned and went out of the yard through the gap in the hedge ; then she looked around. She caught sight of the blue figure in the

garden. " There she is," said she.

She went around the house to the garden. She wore a gay cashmere-patterned calico dress with her mourning bonnet, and she held it carefully away from the dewy grass and vines.

The other woman did not notice her until she was close to her and said, " Good-mornin , Betsey." Then she started and turned around.

" Why, Mis Caxton ! That you ?" said she.

" Yes. I ve been standin at your door for the last half-hour. I was jest goin away when I caught sight of you out here."

In spite of her brisk speech her manner was subdued. She drew down the corners of her mouth sadly.

" I declare I m dreadful sorry you had to stan there so long !" said the other woman.

She set a pan partly filled with beans on the ground, wiped her hands, which were damp and green from the wet vines, on her apron, then extended her right one with a solemn and sympathetic air.

" It don t make much odds, Betsey," replied Mrs. Caxton. " I ain t got much to take up my time nowadays." She sighed heavily as she shook hands, and the other echoed her.

"We ll go right in now. I m dreadful sorry you stood there so long," said Betsey.

" You d better finish pickin your beans."

" No ; I wa n t goin to pick any more. I was jest goirf in."

"I declare, Betsey Dole, I shouldn't think you'd got enough for a cat!" said Mrs. Caxton, eyeing the pan.

"I've got pretty near all there is. I guess I've got more flowerin' beans than eatin' ones, anyway."

"I should think you had," said Mrs. Caxton, surveying the row of bean-poles topped with swarms of delicate red flowers. "I should think they were pretty near all flowerin' ones. Had any peas?"

"I didn't have more'n three or four messes. I guess I planted sweet-peas mostly. I don't know hardly how I happened to."

"Had any summer squash?"

"Two or three. There's some more set, if they ever get ripe. I planted some gourds. I think they look real pretty on the kitchen shelf in the winter."

"I should think you'd got a sage bed big enough for the whole town."

"Well, I have got a pretty good-sized one. I always liked them blue sage-blows. You'd better hold up your dress real careful goin' through here, Mis Caxton, or you'll get it wet."

The two women picked their way through the dewy grass, around a corner of the hedge, and Betsey ushered her visitor into the house.

"Set right down in the rockin'-chair," said she. "I'll jest carry these beans out into the kitchen."

"I should think you'd better get another pan and string 'em, or you won't get 'em done for dinner."

"Well, mebbe I will, if you'll excuse it, Mis Caxton."

The beans had ought to boil quite a while ; they re pretty old."

Betsey went into the kitchen and returned with a pan and an old knife. She seated herself opposite Mrs. Caxton, and began to string and cut the beans.

" If I was in your place I shouldn t feel as if I d got enough to boil a kettle for," said Mrs. Caxton, eying the beans. " I should most have thought when you didn t have any more room for a garden than you ve got that you d planted more real beans and peas instead of so many flowerin I ones. I d rather have a good mess of green peas boiled with a piece of salt pork than all the sweet-peas you could give me. I like flowers well enough, but I never set up for a butterfly, an I want some thing else to live on." She looked at Betsey with pensive superiority.

Betsey was near-sighted ; she had to bend low over the beans in order to string them. She was fifty years old, but she wore her streaky light hair in curls like a young girl. The curls hung over her faded cheeks and almost concealed them. Once in a while she flung them back with a childish gesture which sat strangely upon her.

" I dare say you re in the right of it," she said, meekly.

" I know I am. You folks that write poetry wouldn t have a single thing to eat growin if they were left alone. And that brings to mind what I come for. I ve been thinkin about it ever since our little Willie left us." Mrs. Caxton s manner was suddenly full of shamefaced dramatic fervor, her eyes reddened with tears.

Betsey looked up inquiringly, throwing back her curls. Her face took on unconsciously lines of grief so like the other woman s that she looked like her for the minute.

" I thought maybe," Mrs. Caxton went on, tremulously, " you d be willin to write a few lines."

" Of course I will, Mis Caxton. I ll be glad to, if I can do em to suit you," Betsey said, tearfully.

" I thought jest a few lines. You could mention how handsome he was, and good, and I never had to punish him but once in his life, and how pleased he was with his little new suit, and what a sufferer he was, and how we hope he is at rest in a better land."

" I ll try, Mis Caxton, I ll try," sobbed Betsey. The two women wept together for a few minutes.

"It seems as if I couldn t have it so sometimes," Mrs. Caxton said, brokenly. " I keep thinkin he s in the other room. Every time I go back home when I ve been away it s like losin him again. Oh, it don t seem as if I could go home and not find him there it don t, it don t ! Oh, you don t know anything about it, Betsey. You never had any children !"

" I don t s pose I do, Mis Caxton ; I don t s pose I do."

Presently Mrs. Caxton wiped her eyes. " I ve been thinkin ," said she, keeping her mouth steady with an effort, " that it would be real pretty to have some lines printed on some sheets of white paper with a neat black border. I d like to send some to my folks, and one to the Perkinses in Brigham, and there s a good many others I thought would value em."

" I ll do jest the best I can, Mis Caxton, an be glad to. It s little enough anybody can do at such times."

Mrs. Caxton broke out weeping again. " Oh, it s true, it s true, Betsey !" she sobbed. " Nobody can do anything, and nothin* amounts to anything poetry or anything else when he s gone. Nothin can bring him back. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do ?"

Mrs. Caxton dried her tears again, and arose to take

leave. "Well, I must be goin', or Wilson won't have any dinner," she said, with an effort at self-control.

"Well, I'll do jest the best I can with the poetry," said Betsey. "I'll write it this afternoon." She had set down her pan of beans and was standing beside Mrs. Caxton. She reached up and straightened her black bonnet, which had slipped backward.

"I've got to get a pin," said Mrs. Caxton, tearfully. "I can't keep it anywheres. It drags right off my head, the veil is so heavy."

Betsey went to the door with her visitor. "It's dreadful dusty, ain't it?" she remarked, in that sad, contemptuous tone with which one speaks of discomforts in the presence of affliction.

"Terrible," replied Mrs. Caxton. "I wouldn't wear my black dress in it nohow; a black bonnet is bad enough. This dress is most too good. It's enough to spoil every thing. Well, I'm much obliged to you, Betsey, for bein' willin' to do that."

"I'll do jest the best I can, Mis Caxton."

After Betsey had watched her visitor out of the yard she returned to the sitting-room and took up the pan of beans. She looked doubtfully at the handful of beans all nicely strung and cut up. "I declare I don't know what to do," said she. "Seems as if I should kind of relish these, but it's goin' to take some time to cook 'em, tendin' the fire an' everything, an' I'd ought to go to work on that poetry. Then, there's another thing, if I have 'em to-day, I can't to-morrow. Mebbe I shall take more comfort thinkin' about 'em. I guess I'll leave 'em over till to-morrow."

Betsey carried the pan of beans out into the kitchen and set them away in the pantry. She stood scrutinizing the

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shelves like a veritable Mother Hubbard. There was a plate containing three or four potatoes and a slice of cold boiled pork, and a spoonful of red jelly in a tumbler; that was all the food in sight. Betsey stooped and lifted the lid from an earthen jar on the floor. She took out two slices of bread. "There !" said she. " I ll have this bread and that jelly this noon, an to-night I ll have a kind of dinner-supper with them potatoes warmed up with the pork. An then I can sit right down an go to work on that poetry."

It was scarcely eleven o clock, and not time for dinner. Betsey returned to the sitting-room, got an old black port folio and pen and ink out of the chimney cupboard, and seated herself to work. She meditated, and wrote one line, then another. Now and then she read aloud what she had written with a solemn intonation. She sat there thinking and writing, and the time went on. The twelve-o clock bell rang, but she never noticed it ; she had quite forgotten the bread and jelly. The long curls drooped over her cheeks ; her thin yellow hand, cramped around the pen, moved slowly and fitfully over the paper. The light in the room was dim and green, like the light in an arbor, from the tall hedge before the windows. Great plummy bunches of asparagus waved over the tops of the looking-glass ; a framed sampler, a steel engraving of a female head taken from some old magazine, and sheaves of dried grasses hung on or were fastened to the walls ; vases and tumblers of flowers stood on the shelf and table. The air was heavy and sweet.

Betsey in this room, bending over her portfolio, looked like the very genius of gentle, old-fashioned, sentimental poetry. It seemed as if one, given the premises of herself and the room, could easily deduce what she would write, and read without seeing those lines wherein flowers rhymed sweetly with vernal bowers, home with beyond the tomb, and heaven with even.

The summer afternoon wore on. It grew warmer and closer ; the air was full of the rasping babble of insects,

with the cicadas shrilling over them; now and then a team passed, and a dust cloud floated over the top of the hedge ; the canary at the door chirped and trilled, and Betsey wrote poor little Willie Caxton s obituary poetry.

Tears stood in her pale blue eyes ; occasionally they rolled down her cheeks, and she wiped them away. She kept her handkerchief in her lap with her portfolio. When she looked away from the paper she seemed to see two childish forms in the room one purely human, a boy clad in his little girl petticoats, with a fair chubby face ; the other in a little straight white night-gown, with long, shining wings, and the same face. Betsey had not enough imagination to change the face. Little Willie Caxton s angel^ was still himself to her, although decked in the paraphernalia of the resurrection.

"I s pose I can t feel about it nor write about it anything the way I could if I d had any children of my own an lost em. I s pose it would have come home to me different," Betsey murmured once, sniffing. A soft color flamed up under her curls at the thought. For a second the room seemed all aslant with white wings, and smiling with the faces of children that had never been. Betsey straightened herself as if she were trying to be dignified to her inner consciousness. " That s one trouble I ve been clear of, any how," said she ; " an I guess I can enter into her feelin s considerable."

She glanced at a jrreat Dink shell on the shelf, and remembered how she had often given it to the dead child to play with when he had been in with his mother, and how tie had put it to his ear to hear the sea.

* Dear little fellow !" she sobbed, and sat awhile with her handkerchief at her face.

Betsey wrote her poem upon backs of old letters and odd scraps of paper. She found it difficult to procure enough paper for fair copies of her poems when composed ; she was

forced to be very economical with the first draft. Her portfolio was piled with a loose litter of written papers when she at length arose and stretched her stiff limbs. It was near sunset; men with dinner-pails were tramping past the gate, going home from their work.

Betsey laid the portfolio on the table. " There ! I ve wrote sixteen verses," said she, " an I guess I ve got every thing in. I guess she ll think that s enough. I can copy it off nice to-morrow. I can t see to-night to do it, any how."

There were red spots on Betsey s cheeks ; her knees were unsteady when she walked. She went into the kitchen and made a fire, and set on the tea-kettle. " I guess I won t warm up them potatoes to-night," said she ; " I ll have the bread an jelly, an save em for breakfast. Somehow I don t seem to feel so much like em as I did, an fried potatoes is apt to lay heavy at night."

When the kettle boiled, Betsey drank her cup of tea and soaked her slice of bread in it ; then she put away her cup and saucer and plate, and went out to water her garden. The weather was so dry and hot it had to be watered every night. Betsey had to carry the water from a neighbor s well ; her own was dry. Back and forth she went in the deepening twilight, her slender body strained to one side with the heavy water-pail, until the garden-mould looked dark and wet. Then she took in the canary-bird, locked up her house, and soon her light went out. Often on these summer nights Betsey went to bed without lighting a lamp at all. There was no moon, but it was a beautiful starlight night. She lay awake nearly all night, thinking of her poem. She altered several lines in her mind.

She arose early, made herself a cup of tea, and warmed over the potatoes, then sat down to copy the poem. She wrote it out on both sides of note-paper, in a neat, cramped hand. It was the middle of the afternoon before it was finished. She had been obliged to stop work and cook the

beans for dinner, although she begrudged the time. When the poem was fairly copied, she rolled it neatly and tied it with a bit of black ribbon ; then she made herself ready to carry it to Mrs. Caxton s.

It was a hot afternoon. Betsey went down the street in her thinnest dress an old delaine, with delicate bunches of faded flowers on a faded green ground. There was a narrow green belt ribbon around her long waist. She wore a green barege bonnet, stiffened with rattans, scooping over her face, with her curls pushed forward over her thin cheeks in two bunches, and she carried a small green parasol with a jointed handle. Her costume was obsolete, even in the little country village where she lived. She had worn it every summer for the last twenty years. She made no more change in her attire than the old perennials in her garden. She had no money with which to buy new clothes, and the old satisfied her. She had come to regard them as being as unalterably a part of herself as her body.

Betsey went on, setting her slim, cloth-gaitered feet daintily in the hot sand of the road. She carried her roll of poetry in a black-mitted hand. She walked rather slowly. She was not very strong ; there was a limp feeling in her knees ; her face, under the green shade of her bonnet, was pale and moist with the heat.

She was glad to reach Mrs. Caxton s and sit down in her parlor, damp and cool and dark as twilight, for the blinds and curtains had been drawn all day. Not a breath of the fervid out-door air had penetrated it.

" Come right in this way ; it s cooler than the sittin - room," Mrs. Caxton said ; and Betsey sank into the hair cloth rocker and waved a palm-leaf fan.

Mrs. Caxton sat close to the window in the dim light, and read the poem. She took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes as she read. " It s beautiful, beautiful," she said, tearfully, when she had finished. " It s jest as comfortin

as it can be, and you worked that in about his new suit so nice. I feel real obliged to you, Betsey, and you shall have one of the printed ones when they re done. I m goin to see to it right off."

Betsey flushed and smiled. It was to her as if her poem had been approved and accepted by one of the great magazines. She had the pride and self-wonderment of recognized genius. She went home buoyantly, under the wilting sun, after her call was done. When she reached home there was no one to whom she could tell her triumph, but the hot spicy breath of the evergreen hedge and the fervent sweetness of the sweet-peas seemed to greet her like the voices of friends.

She could scarcely wait for the printed poem. Mrs. Caxton brought it, and she inspected it, neatly printed in its black border. She was quite overcome with innocent pride.

" Well, I don t know but it does read pretty well," said she.

" It s beautiful," said Mrs. Caxton, fervently. " Mr. White said he never read anything any more touchin , when I carried it to him to print. I think folks are goin to think a good deal of havin it. I ve had two dozen printed."

It was to Betsey like a large edition of a book. She had written obituary poems before, but never one had been printed in this sumptuous fashion. " I declare I think it would look pretty framed !" said she.

"Well, I don t know but it would," said Mrs. Caxton. " Anybody might have a neat little black frame, and it would look real appropriate."

"I wonder how much it would cost?" said Betsey.

After Mrs. Caxton had gone, she sat long, staring admir

ingly at the poem, and speculating as to the cost of a frame.
" There ain t no use ; I can t have it nohow, not if it don t cost more n a quarter of a dollar," said she.

Then she put the poem away and got her supper. No body knew how frugal Betsey Dole s suppers and break fasts and dinners were. Nearly all her food in the summer came from the scanty vegetables which flourished between the flowers in her garden. She ate scarcely more than her canary-bird, and sang as assiduously. Her income was al most infinitesimal : the interest at a low per cent, of a tiny sum in the village savings-bank, the remnant of her father s little hoard after his funeral expenses had been paid. Betsey had lived upon it for twenty years, and considered herself well-to-do. She had never received a cent for her poems ; she had not thought of such a thing as possible. The appearance of this last in such shape was worth more to her than its words represented in as many dollars.

Betsey kept the poem pinned on the wall under the looking-glass ; if any one came in, she tried with delicate hints to call attention to it. It was two weeks after she received it that the downfall of her innocent pride came.

One afternoon Mrs. Caxton called. It was raining hard. Betsey could scarcely believe it was she when she went to the door and found her standing there.

" Why, Mis Caxton !" said she. " Ain t you wet to your skin?"

" Yes, I guess I be, pretty near. I s pose I hadn t ought to come way down here in such a soak ; but I went into Sarah Rogers s a minute after dinner, and something she said made me so mad, I made up my mind I d come down here and tell you about it if I got drowned." Mrs. Caxton was out of breath ; rain-drops trickled from her hair over her face ; she stood in the door and shut her umbrella with a vicious shake to scatter the water from it. " I don t know what you re goin to do with this," said she ; " it s

drippin'."

" I'll take it out an put it in the kitchen sink."

" Well, I'll take off my shawl here too, and you can hang it out in the kitchen. I spread this shawl out. I thought it would keep the rain off me some. I know one thing, I'm goin' to have a waterproof if I live."

When the two women were seated in the sitting-room, Mrs. Caxton was quiet for a moment. There was a hesitating look on her face, fresh with the moist wind, with strands of wet hair clinging to the temples.

"I don't know as I had ought to tell you," she said, doubtfully.

" Why hadn't you ought to ?"

" Well, I don't care ; I'm goin' to, anyhow. I think you'd ought to know, an it ain't so bad for you as it is for me. It don't begin to be. I put considerable money into em. I think Mr. White was pretty high, myself."

Betsey looked scared. " What is it ?" she asked, in a weak voice.

" Sarah Rogers says that the minister told her Ida that that poetry you wrote was jest as poor as it could be, an it was iu dreadful bad taste to have it printed an I sent round that way. What do you think of that ?"

Betsey did not reply. She sat looking at Mrs. Caxton as a victim whom the first blow had not killed might look at her executioner. Her face was like a pale wedge of ice between her curls.

Mrs. Caxton went on. " Yes, she said that right to my face, word for word. An there was something else. She said the minister said that you had never wrote anything

that could be called poetry, an it was a dreadful waste of time. I don t s pose he thought twas comin back to you. You know he goes with Ida Rogers, an I s pose he said it to her kind of confidential when she showed him the poetry. There ! I gave Sarah Rogers one of them nice printed ones, an she acted glad enough to have it. Bad taste ! H m ! If anybody wants to say anything against that beautiful poetry, printed with that nice black border, they can. I don t care if it s the minister, or who it is. I don t care if he does write poetry himself, an has had some printed in a magazine. Maybe his ain t quite so fine as he thinks tis. Maybe them magazine folks jest took his for lack of something better. I d like to have you send that poetry there. Bad taste ! I jest got right up. * Sarah Rogers, says I, * I hope you won t never do anything your self in any worse taste. I trembled so I could hardly speak, and I made up my mind I d come right straight over here."

Mrs. Caxton went on and on. Betsey sat listening, and saying nothing. She looked ghastly. Just before Mrs. Caxton went home she noticed it. " Why, Betsey Dole," she cried, "you look as white as a sheet You ain t takin it to heart as much as all that comes to, I hope. Good ness, I wish I hadn t told you !"

" I d a good deal ruther you told me," replied Betsey, with a certain dignity. She looked at Mrs. Caxton. Her back was as stiff as if she were bound to a stake.

"Well, I thought you would," said Mrs. Caxton, uneasily ; " and you re dreadful silly if you take it to heart, Betsey, that s all I ve got to say. Goodness, I guess I don t, and it s full as hard on me as tis on you !"

Mrs. Caxton arose to go. Betsey brought her shawl and umbrella from the kitchen, and helped her off. Mrs. Caxton turned on the door-step and looked back at Betsey s white face. " Now don t go to thinkin about it any more," said she. " I ain t goin to. It ain t worth mindin . Every

body knows what Sarah Rogers is. Good-by."

"Good-by, Mis Caxton," said Betsey. She went back into the sitting-room. It was a cold rain, and the room was gloomy and chilly. She stood looking out of the window, watching the rain pelt on the hedge. The bird-cage hung at the other window. The bird watched her with his head on one side ; then he begun to chirp.

Suddenly Betsey faced about and began talking. It was not as if she were talking to herself; it seemed as if she recognized some other presence in the room. " I d like to know if it s fair," said she. " I d like to know if you think it s fair. Had I ought to have been born with the wantin to write poetry if I couldn t write it had I ? Had I ought to have been let to write all my life, an not know before there wa n t any use in it ? Would it be fair if that canary-bird there, that ain t never done anything but sing, should turn out not to be singin ? Would it, I d like to know ? S pose them sweet-peas shouldn t be smellin the right way ? I ain t been dealt with as fair as they have, I d like to know if I have."

The bird trilled and trilled. It was as if the golden down on his throat bubbled. Betsey went across the room to a cupboard beside the chimney. On the shelves were neatly stacked newspapers and little white rolls of writing-paper. Betsey began clearing the shelves. She took out the newspapers first, got the scissors, and cut a poem neatly out of the corner of each. Then she took up the clipped poems and the white rolls in her apron, and carried them into the kitchen. She cleaned out the stove carefully, removing every trace of ashes ; then she put in the papers, and set them on fire. She stood watching them as their edges curled and blackened, then leaped into flame. Her face twisted as if the fire were curling over it also. Other women might have burned their lovers letters in agony of heart. Betsey had never had any lover, but she was burning all the love-letters that had passed between her and life. When the flames died out she got a blue china sugar-

bowl from the pantry and dipped the ashes into it with one of her thin silver teaspoons; then she put on the cover and set it away in the sitting-room cupboard.

The bird, who had been silent while she was out, began chirping again. Betsey went back to the pantry and got a lump of sugar, which she stuck between the cage wires. She looked at the clock on the kitchen shelf as she went by. It was after six. " I guess I don t want any supper to-night," she muttered.

She sat down by the window again. The bird pecked at his sugar. Betsey shivered and coughed. She had coughed more or less for years. People said she had the old-fashioned consumption. She sat at the window until it was quite dark ; then she went to bed in her little bedroom out of the sitting-room. She shivered so she could not hold herself upright crossing the room. She coughed a great deal in the night.

Betsey was always an early riser. She was up at five the next morning. The sun shone, but it was very cold for the season. The leaves showed white in a north wind, and the flowers looked brighter than usual, though they were bent with the rain of the day before. Betsey went out in the garden to straighten her sweet-peas.

Coming back, a neighbor passing in the street eyed her curiously. " Why, Betsey, you sick ?" said she.

" No ; I m kinder chilly, that s all," replied Betsey.

But the woman went home and reported that Betsey Dole looked dreadfully, and she didn t believe she d ever see an other summer.

It was now late August. Before October it was quite generally recognized that Betsey Dole s life was nearly over. She had no relatives, and hired nurses were rare in this little village. Mrs. Caxton came voluntarily and took

care of her, only going home to prepare her husband's meals. Betsey's bed was moved into the sitting-room, and the neighbors came every day to see her, and brought little delicacies. Betsey had talked very little all her life ; she talked less now, and there was a reticence about her which somewhat intimidated the other women. They would look pityingly and solemnly at her, and whisper in the entry when they went out.

Betsey never complained ; but she kept asking if the minister had got home. He had been called away by his mother's illness, and returned only a week before Betsey died.

He came over at once to see her. Mrs. Caxton ushered him in one afternoon.

" Here's Mr. Lang come to see you, Betsey," said she, in the tone she would have used towards a little child. She placed the rocking-chair for the minister, and was about to seat herself, when Betsey spoke :

"Would you mind goin out in the kitchen jest a few minutes, Mis Caxton ?" said she.

Mrs. Caxton arose, and went out with an embarrassed trot. Then there was silence. The minister was a young man a country boy who had worked his way through a country college. He was gaunt and awkward, but sturdy in his loose clothes. He had a homely, impetuous face, with a good forehead.

He looked at Betsey's gentle, wasted face, sunken in the pillow, framed by its clusters of curls ; finally he began to speak in the stilted fashion, yet with a certain force by reason of his unpolished honesty, about her spiritual welfare. Betsey listened quietly ; now and then she assented. She had been a church member for years. It seemed now to the young man that this elderly maiden, drawing near the end of her simple, innocent life, had indeed her lamp, which no strong winds of temptation had ever met, well trimmed

and burning.

When he paused, Betsey spoke. " Will you go to the cupboard side of the chimney and bring me the blue sugar-bowl on the top shelf?" said she, feebly.

The young man stared at her a minute ; then he went to the cupboard, and brought the sugar-bowl to her. He held it, and Betsey took off the lid with her weak hand. "Do you see what s in there ?" said she.

" It looks like ashes."

" It s the ashes of all the poetry I ever wrote."

"Why, what made you burn it, Miss Dole ?"

"I found out it wa n t worth nothinV

The minister looked at her in a bewildered way. He began to question if she were not wandering in her mind. He did not once suspect his own connection with the matter.

Betsey fastened her eager, sunken eyes upon his face.

" What I want to know is if you ll tend to havin this buried with me."

The minister recoiled. He thought to himself that she certainly was wandering.

" No, I ain t out of my head," said Betsey. " I know what I m sayin\ Maybe it s queer soundin , but it s a no tion I ve took. If you ll tend to it, I shall be much obliged. I don t know anybody else I can ask."

"Well, I ll attend to it, if you wish me to, Miss Dole," said the minister, in a serious, perplexed manner. She re placed the lid on the sugar-bowl, and left it in his hands.

"Well, I shall be much obliged if you will tend to it;

an now there s something else," said she.

" What is it, Miss Dole ?"

She hesitated a moment. " You write poetry, don t you ?"

The minister colored. " Why, yes ; a little sometimes."

" It s good poetry, ain t it ? They printed some in a magazine."

The minister laughed confusedly. "Well, Miss Dole,, I don t know how good poetry it may be, but they did print some in a magazine."

Betsey lay looking at him. " I never wrote none that was good," she whispered, presently ; " but I ve been thinkin if you would jest write a few lines about me afterward I ve been thinkin that mebbe my dyin was goin to make me a good subject for poetry, if I never wrote none. If you would jest write a few lines."

The minister stood holding the sugar-bowl ; he was quite pale with bewilderment and sympathy. " I ll do the best I can, Miss Dole," he stammered.

" I ll be much obliged," said Betsey, as if the sense of grateful obligation was immortal like herself. She smiled, and the sweetness of the smile was as evident through the drawn lines of her mouth as the old red in the leaves of a withered rose. The sun was setting ; a red beam flashed softly over the top of the hedge and lay along the opposite wall ; then the bird in his cage began to chirp. He chimed faster and faster until he trilled into a triumphant song.



SLEEPY JOHN

From The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Czech Folk Tales*, by Josef Baudiš

Once there was a lad named John, and he used to go to sleep always and everywhere. One day he came to an inn where some farmers were feeding their horses. So he crept into the cart, lay down on the straw, and went to sleep. When the farmers had driven some distance, they noticed John asleep in the cart. They thought: "What are we to do with him? We have a beer cask here. We'll put him in it and leave him in the forest." So they shut him in the cask, and off they drove.

John went on sleeping in the cask for a long time. Suddenly he woke up and found himself in the cask, but he did not know how he had got into it, neither did he know where he was. There was something running to and fro near the cask, so he looked through the bunghole and saw a great number of wolves gathered under the rocks. They had flocked round, attracted by the human smell. One of the wolves pushed his tail through the hole, and Sleepy John began to think that the hour of his death was approaching. But he wound the wolf's tail round his hand. The wolf was terrified, and, dragging the cask after him, he ran after the rest of the wolves, who set off in all directions. Their terror grew greater and greater as the cask bumped after them. At last the cask struck against a rock and was smashed. John let go the wolf, who took himself off as fast as he could.

Now John found himself in a wild mountain region. He began walking about among the mountains and he met a hermit. The hermit said to him: "You may stay here with me. I shall die in three days. Bury me then, and I will pay you well for it."

So John stayed with him, and, when the third day came, the hermit, who was about to die, gave him a stick, saying: "In whatever direction you point this stick, you will find yourself there." Then he gave him a knapsack, saying: "Anything you want you will find in this knapsack." Then he gave him a cap, saying: "As soon as you put this cap on, nobody will be able to see you."

Then the hermit died, and John buried him.

John gathered his things together, pointed the stick, and said:

"Let me be instantly in the town where the king lives." He found himself there on the instant, and he was told that the queen would every night wear out a dozen pairs of shoes, yet nobody was able to follow her track. The lords were all flocking to offer to follow the queen's traces, and John went too. He went into the palace and had himself announced to the king. When he came before the king, he said that he would like to trace the queen. The king asked him: "Who are you?"

He answered "Sleepy John."

The king said: "And how are you going to trace her, when you are sleeping all the time? If you fail to trace her you will lose your head."

John answered that he would try to trace her all the same.

When the evening was come the queen went to bed in one room and John went to bed in the next room, through which the queen had to pass. He did not go to sleep, but when the queen was going by he pretended to be in a deep slumber. So the queen lit a candle and scorched the soles of his feet to make sure that he was asleep. But John didn't stir, and so she was certain that he was asleep. Then she took her twelve pairs of new shoes and off she went.

John got up, put his cap on, and pointed with his stick and said: "Let me be where the queen is."

Now, when the queen came to a certain rock, the earth opened before her and two dragons came to meet her. They took her on their backs and carried her as far as the lead forest. Then John said: "Let me be where the queen is," and instantly he was in the lead forest. So he broke off a twig for a proof and put it in his knapsack. But when he broke off the twig it gave out a shrill sound as if a bell were ringing. The queen was frightened, but she rode on again. John pointed with his stick and said: "Let me be where the queen is," and instantly he was in the tin forest. He broke off a twig again and put it in his knapsack, and it rang again. The queen turned pale, but she rode on again. John pointed with his stick again and said: "Let me be where the queen is," and instantly he was in the silver

forest. He broke off a twig again and put it into his knapsack. As he broke it, it gave out a ringing sound and the queen fainted. The dragons hastened on again till they came to a green meadow.

A crowd of devils came to meet them here, and they revived the queen. Then they had a feast. Sleepy John was there too. The cook was not at home that day, so John sat down in his place, and, as he had his cap on, nobody could see him. They put aside a part of the food for the cook, but John ate it all. They were all surprised to see all the food they put aside disappearing. They couldn't make out what was happening, but they didn't care very much. And when the banquet was at an end the devils began to dance with the queen, and they kept on dancing until the queen had worn out all her shoes. When her shoes were worn out, those two dragons took her on their backs again and brought her to the place where the earth had opened before her. John said: "Let me be where the queen is." By this time she was walking on the earth again, and he followed her. When they came near the palace he went ahead of the queen and went to bed; and, as the queen was going in, she saw him sleeping, and so she went to her own room and lay down and slept.

In the morning the lords gathered together and the king asked whether any of them had tracked the queen. But none of them could say "Yes."

So he summoned Sleepy John before him. John said:

"Gracious Lord King, I did indeed track her, and I know that she used up those twelve pairs of shoes upon the green meadows in Hell."

The queen stood forth at once, and John took from his knapsack the leaden twig and said: "The queen was carried by two dragons towards Hell, and she came to the leaden forest; there I broke off this twig and the queen was frightened."

The king said: "That's no good. You might have made the twig yourself."

So John produced the tin twig from his knapsack and said: "After that the queen drove through the tin forest, and there I broke off this twig. That time the queen grew pale."

The king said: "You might have made even this twig."

So John produced the silver twig and said: "Afterwards the queen drove through the silver forest, and when I broke off this twig she fainted, and so she was until the devils brought her to life again."

The queen, seeing that all was known, cried out: "Let the earth swallow me!" and she was swallowed by the earth.

Sleepy John got the half of the kingdom, and, when the king died, the other half too.



THE BLUE HOTEL

By Stephen Crane

From The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Monster and Other Stories*

I

The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a gray swampish hush. It stood alone on the prairie, and when the snow was falling the town two hundred yards away was not visible. But when the traveller alighted at the railway station he was obliged to pass the Palace Hotel before he could come upon the company of low clapboard houses which composed Fort Romper, and it was not to be thought that any traveller could pass the Palace Hotel without looking at it. Pat Scully, the proprietor, had proved himself a master of strategy when he chose his paints. It is true that on clear days, when the great trans-continental expresses, long lines of swaying Pullmans, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight, and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed shame, pity, horror, in a laugh. But to the citizens of this prairie town and to the people who would naturally stop there, Pat Scully had performed a feat. With this opulence and splendor, these creeds, classes,

egotisms, that streamed through Romper on the rails day after day, they had no color in common.

As if the displayed delights of such a blue hotel were not sufficiently enticing, it was Scully's habit to go every morning and evening to meet the leisurely trains that stopped at Romper and work his seductions upon any man that he might see wavering, gripsack in hand.

One morning, when a snow-cruised engine dragged its long string of freight cars and its one passenger coach to the station, Scully performed the marvel of catching three men. One was a shaky and quick-eyed Swede, with a great shining cheap valise; one was a tall bronzed cowboy, who was on his way to a ranch near the Dakota line; one was a little silent man from the East, who didn't look it, and didn't announce it. Scully practically made them prisoners. He was so nimble and merry and kindly that each probably felt it would be the height of brutality to try to escape. They trudged off over the creaking board sidewalks in the wake of the eager little Irishman. He wore a heavy fur cap squeezed tightly down on his head. It caused his two red ears to stick out stiffly, as if they were made of tin.

At last, Scully, elaborately, with boisterous hospitality, conducted them through the portals of the blue hotel. The room which they entered was small. It seemed to be merely a proper temple for an enormous stove, which, in the centre, was humming with godlike violence. At various points on its surface the iron had become luminous and glowed yellow from the heat. Beside the stove Scully's son Johnnie was playing High-Five with an old farmer who had whiskers both gray and sandy. They were quarrelling. Frequently the old farmer turned his face towards a box of sawdust--colored brown from tobacco juice--that was behind the stove, and spat with an air of great impatience and irritation. With a loud flourish of words Scully destroyed the game of cards, and bustled his son up-stairs with part of the baggage of the new guests. He himself conducted them to three basins of the coldest water in the world. The cowboy and the Easterner burnished themselves fiery-red with this water, until it seemed to be some kind of a metal polish. The Swede, however, merely dipped his fingers gingerly and with trepidation. It was notable that throughout this series of small ceremonies the three travellers were made to feel

that Scully was very benevolent. He was conferring great favors upon them. He handed the towel from one to the other with an air of philanthropic impulse.

Afterwards they went to the first room, and, sitting about the stove, listened to Scully's officious clamor at his daughters, who were preparing the mid-day meal. They reflected in the silence of experienced men who tread carefully amid new people. Nevertheless, the old farmer, stationary, invincible in his chair near the warmest part of the stove, turned his face from the sawdust box frequently and addressed a glowing commonplace to the strangers. Usually he was answered in short but adequate sentences by either the cowboy or the Easterner. The Swede said nothing. He seemed to be occupied in making furtive estimates of each man in the room. One might have thought that he had the sense of silly suspicion which comes to guilt. He resembled a badly frightened man.

Later, at dinner, he spoke a little, addressing his conversation entirely to Scully. He volunteered that he had come from New York, where for ten years he had worked as a tailor. These facts seemed to strike Scully as fascinating, and afterwards he volunteered that he had lived at Romper for fourteen years. The Swede asked about the crops and the price of labor. He seemed barely to listen to Scully's extended replies. His eyes continued to rove from man to man.

Finally, with a laugh and a wink, he said that some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after his statement he straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again, loudly. It was plain that the demonstration had no meaning to the others. They looked at him wondering and in silence.

II

As the men trooped heavily back into the front-room, the two little windows presented views of a turmoiling sea of snow. The huge arms of the wind were making attempts--mighty, circular, futile--to embrace the flakes as they sped. A gate-post like a still man with a blanched face stood aghast amid this profligate fury. In a hearty voice Scully

announced the presence of a blizzard. The guests of the blue hotel, lighting their pipes, assented with grunts of lazy masculine contentment. No island of the sea could be exempt in the degree of this little room with its humming stove. Johnnie, son of Scully, in a tone which defined his opinion of his ability as a card-player, challenged the old farmer of both gray and sandy whiskers to a game of High-Five. The farmer agreed with a contemptuous and bitter scoff. They sat close to the stove, and squared their knees under a wide board. The cowboy and the Easterner watched the game with interest. The Swede remained near the window, aloof, but with a countenance that showed signs of an inexplicable excitement.

The play of Johnnie and the gray-beard was suddenly ended by another quarrel. The old man arose while casting a look of heated scorn at his adversary. He slowly buttoned his coat, and then stalked with fabulous dignity from the room. In the discreet silence of all other men the Swede laughed. His laughter rang somehow childish. Men by this time had begun to look at him askance, as if they wished to inquire what ailed him.

A new game was formed jocosely. The cowboy volunteered to become the partner of Johnnie, and they all then turned to ask the Swede to throw in his lot with the little Easterner. He asked some questions about the game, and, learning that it wore many names, and that he had played it when it was under an alias, he accepted the invitation. He strode towards the men nervously, as if he expected to be assaulted. Finally, seated, he gazed from face to face and laughed shrilly. This laugh was so strange that the Easterner looked up quickly, the cowboy sat intent and with his mouth open, and Johnnie paused, holding the cards with still fingers.

Afterwards there was a short silence. Then Johnnie said, "Well, let's get at it. Come on now!" They pulled their chairs forward until their knees were bunched under the board. They began to play, and their interest in the game caused the others to forget the manner of the Swede.

The cowboy was a board-whacker. Each time that he held superior cards he whanged them, one by one, with exceeding force, down upon the improvised table, and took the tricks with a glowing air of prowess

and pride that sent thrills of indignation into the hearts of his opponents. A game with a board-whacker in it is sure to become intense. The countenances of the Easterner and the Swede were miserable whenever the cowboy thundered down his aces and kings, while Johnnie, his eyes gleaming with joy, chuckled and chuckled.

Because of the absorbing play none considered the strange ways of the Swede. They paid strict heed to the game. Finally, during a lull caused by a new deal, the Swede suddenly addressed Johnnie: "I suppose there have been a good many men killed in this room." The jaws of the others dropped and they looked at him.

"What in hell are you talking about?" said Johnnie.

The Swede laughed again his blatant laugh, full of a kind of false courage and defiance. "Oh, you know what I mean all right," he answered.

"I'm a liar if I do!" Johnnie protested. The card was halted, and the men stared at the Swede. Johnnie evidently felt that as the son of the proprietor he should make a direct inquiry. "Now, what might you be drivin' at, mister?" he asked. The Swede winked at him. It was a wink full of cunning. His fingers shook on the edge of the board. "Oh, maybe you think I have been to nowheres. Maybe you think I'm a tenderfoot?"

"I don't know nothin' about you," answered Johnnie, "and I don't give a damn where you've been. All I got to say is that I don't know what you're driving at. There hain't never been nobody killed in this room."

The cowboy, who had been steadily gazing at the Swede, then spoke: "What's wrong with you, mister?"

Apparently it seemed to the Swede that he was formidably menaced. He shivered and turned white near the corners of his mouth. He sent an appealing glance in the direction of the little Easterner. During these moments he did not forget to wear his air of advanced pot-valor. "They say they don't know what I mean," he remarked mockingly to the Easterner.

The latter answered after prolonged and cautious reflection. "I don't understand you," he said, impassively.

The Swede made a movement then which announced that he thought he had encountered treachery from the only quarter where he had expected sympathy, if not help. "Oh, I see you are all against me. I see--"

The cowboy was in a state of deep stupefaction. "Say." he cried, as he tumbled the deck violently down upon the board "--say, what are you gittin' at, hey?"

The Swede sprang up with the celerity of a man escaping from a snake on the floor. "I don't want to fight!" he shouted. "I don't want to fight!"

The cowboy stretched his long legs indolently and deliberately. His hands were in his pockets. He spat into the sawdust box. "Well, who the hell thought you did?" he inquired.

The Swede backed rapidly towards a corner of the room. His hands were out protectingly in front of his chest, but he was making an obvious struggle to control his fright. "Gentlemen," he quavered, "I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house! I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house!" In his eyes was the dying-swan look. Through the windows could be seen the snow turning blue in the shadow of dusk. The wind tore at the house and some loose thing beat regularly against the clap-boards like a spirit tapping.

A door opened, and Scully himself entered. He paused in surprise as he noted the tragic attitude of the Swede. Then he said, "What's the matter here?"

The Swede answered him swiftly and eagerly: "These men are going to kill me."

"Kill you!" ejaculated Scully. "Kill you! What are you talkin'?"

The Swede made the gesture of a martyr.

Scully wheeled sternly upon his son. "What is this, Johnnie?"

The lad had grown sullen. "Damned if I know," he answered. "I can't make no sense to it." He began to shuffle the cards, fluttering them together with an angry snap. "He says a good many men have been killed in this room, or something like that. And he says he's goin' to be killed here too. I don't know what ails him. He's crazy, I shouldn't wonder."

Scully then looked for explanation to the cowboy, but the cowboy simply shrugged his shoulders.

"Kill you?" said Scully again to the Swede. "Kill you? Man, you're off your nut."

"Oh, I know." burst out the Swede. "I know what will happen. Yes, I'm crazy--yes. Yes, of course, I'm crazy--yes. But I know one thing--" There was a sort of sweat of misery and terror upon his face. "I know I won't get out of here alive."

The cowboy drew a deep breath, as if his mind was passing into the last stages of dissolution. "Well, I'm dog-goned," he whispered to himself.

Scully wheeled suddenly and faced his son. "You've been troublin' this man!"

Johnnie's voice was loud with its burden of grievance. "Why, good Gawd, I ain't done nothin' to 'im."

The Swede broke in. "Gentlemen, do not disturb yourselves. I will leave this house. I will go away because"--he accused them dramatically with his glance--"because I do not want to be killed."

Scully was furious with his son. "Will you tell me what is the matter, you young divil? What's the matter, anyhow? Speak out!"

"Blame it!" cried Johnnie in despair, "don't I tell you I don't know. He--he says we want to kill him, and that's all I know. I can't tell what ails him."

The Swede continued to repeat: "Never mind, Mr. Scully; nevermind. I will leave this house. I will go away, because I do not wish to be killed. Yes, of course, I am crazy--yes. But I know one thing! I will go away. I will leave this house. Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away."

"You will not go 'way," said Scully. "You will not go 'way until I hear the reason of this business. If anybody has troubled you I will take care of him. This is my house. You are under my roof, and I will not allow any peaceable man to be troubled here." He cast a terrible eye upon Johnnie, the cowboy, and the Easterner.

"Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away. I do not wish to be killed." The Swede moved towards the door, which opened upon the stairs. It was evidently his intention to go at once for his baggage.

"No, no," shouted Scully peremptorily; but the white-faced man slid by him and disappeared. "Now," said Scully severely, "what does this mane?"

Johnnie and the cowboy cried together: "Why, we didn't do nothin' to 'im!"

Scully's eyes were cold. "No," he said, "you didn't?"

Johnnie swore a deep oath. "Why this is the wildest loon I ever see. We didn't do nothin' at all. We were jest sittin' here play in' cards, and he--"

The father suddenly spoke to the Easterner. "Mr. Blanc," he asked, "what has these boys been doin'?"

The Easterner reflected again. "I didn't see anything wrong at all," he said at last, slowly.

Scully began to howl. "But what does it mane?" He stared ferociously at his son. "I have a mind to lather you for this, me boy."

Johnnie was frantic. "Well, what have I done?" he bawled at his

father.

III

"I think you are tongue-tied," said Scully finally to his son, the cowboy, and the Easterner; and at the end of this scornful sentence he left the room.

Up-stairs the Swede was swiftly fastening the straps of his great valise. Once his back happened to be half turned towards the door, and, hearing a noise there, he wheeled and sprang up, uttering a loud cry. Scully's wrinkled visage showed grimly in the light of the small lamp he carried. This yellow effulgence, streaming upward, colored only his prominent features, and left his eyes, for instance, in mysterious shadow. He resembled a murderer.

"Man! man!" he exclaimed, "have you gone daffy?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" rejoined the other. "There are people in this world who know pretty nearly as much as you do--understand?"

For a moment they stood gazing at each other. Upon the Swede's deathly pale checks were two spots brightly crimson and sharply edged, as if they had been carefully painted. Scully placed the light on the table and sat himself on the edge of the bed. He spoke ruminatively. "By cracky, I never heard of such a thing in my life. It's a complete muddle. I can't, for the soul of me, think how you ever got this idea into your head." Presently he lifted his eyes and asked: "And did you sure think they were going to kill you?"

The Swede scanned the old man as if he wished to see into his mind. "I did," he said at last. He obviously suspected that this answer might precipitate an outbreak. As he pulled on a strap his whole arm shook, the elbow wavering like a bit of paper.

Scully banged his hand impressively on the foot-board of the bed. "Why, man, we're goin' to have a line of ilictric street-cars in this town next spring."

"A line of electric street-cars," repeated the Swede, stupidly.

"And," said Scully, "there's a new railroad goin' to be built down from Broken Arm to here. Not to mention the four churches and the smashin' big brick school-house. Then there's the big factory, too. Why, in two years Romper 'll be a _metropolis_."

Having finished the preparation of his baggage, the Swede straightened himself. "Mr. Scully," he said, with sudden hardihood, "how much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anythin'," said the old man, angrily.

"Yes, I do," retorted the Swede. He took seventy-five cents from his pocket and tendered it to Scully; but the latter snapped his fingers in disdainful refusal. However, it happened that they both stood gazing in a strange fashion at three silver pieces on the Swede's open palm.

"I'll not take your money," said Scully at last. "Not after what's been goin' on here." Then a plan seemed to strike him. "Here," he cried, picking up his lamp and moving towards the door. "Here! Come with me a minute."

"No," said the Swede, in overwhelming alarm.

"Yes," urged the old man. "Come on! I want you to come and see a picter--just across the hall--in my room."

The Swede must have concluded that his hour was come. His jaw dropped and his teeth showed like a dead man's. He ultimately followed Scully across the corridor, but he had the step of one hung in chains.

Scully flashed the light high on the wall of his own chamber. There was revealed a ridiculous photograph of a little girl. She was leaning against a balustrade of gorgeous decoration, and the formidable bang to her hair was prominent. The figure was as graceful as an upright sled-stake, and, withal, it was of the hue of lead. "There," said Scully, tenderly, "that's the picter of my little girl that died. Her

name was Carrie. She had the purtiest hair you ever saw! I was that fond of her, she--"

Turning then, he saw that the Swede was not contemplating the picture at all, but, instead, was keeping keen watch on the gloom in the rear.

"Look, man!" cried Scully, heartily. "That's the picter of my little gal that died. Her name was Carrie. And then here's the picter of my oldest boy, Michael. He's a lawyer in Lincoln, an' doin' well. I gave that boy a grand eddycation, and I'm glad for it now. He's a fine boy. Look at 'im now. Ain't he bold as blazes, him there in Lincoln, an honored an' respicted gintleman. An honored an' respicted gintleman," concluded Scully with a flourish. And, so saying, he smote the Swede jovially on the back.

The Swede faintly smiled.

"Now," said the old man, "there's only one more thing." He dropped suddenly to the floor and thrust his head beneath the bed. The Swede could hear his muffled voice. "I'd keep it under me piller if it wasn't for that boy Johnnie. Then there's the old woman--Where is it now? I never put it twice in the same place. Ah, now come out with you!"

Presently he backed clumsily from under the bed, dragging with him an old coat rolled into a bundle. "I've fetched him," he muttered. Kneeling on the floor, he unrolled the coat and extracted from its heart a large yellow-brown whiskey bottle.

His first maneuver was to hold the bottle up to the light. Reassured, apparently, that nobody had been tampering with it, he thrust it with a generous movement towards the Swede.

The weak-kneed Swede was about to eagerly clutch this element of strength, but he suddenly jerked his hand away and cast a look of horror upon Scully.

"Drink," said the old man affectionately. He had risen to his feet, and now stood facing the Swede.

There was a silence. Then again Scully said: "Drink!"

The Swede laughed wildly. He grabbed the bottle, put it to his mouth, and as his lips curled absurdly around the opening and his throat worked, he kept his glance, burning with hatred, upon the old man's face.

IV

After the departure of Scully the three men, with the card-board still upon their knees, preserved for a long time an astounded silence. Then Johnnie said: "That's the dod-dangest Swede I ever see."

"He ain't no Swede," said the cowboy, scornfully.

"Well, what is he then?" cried Johnnie. "What is he then?"

"It's my opinion," replied the cowboy deliberately, "he's some kind of a Dutchman." It was a venerable custom of the country to entitle as Swedes all light-haired men who spoke with a heavy tongue. In consequence the idea of the cowboy was not without its daring. "Yes, sir," he repeated. "It's my opinion this feller is some kind of a Dutchman."

"Well, he says he's a Swede, anyhow," muttered Johnnie, sulkily. He turned to the Easterner: "What do you think, Mr. Blanc?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied the Easterner.

"Well, what do you think makes him act that way?" asked the cowboy.

"Why, he's frightened." The Easterner knocked his pipe against a rim of the stove. "He's clear frightened out of his boots."

"What at?" cried Johnnie and cowboy together.

The Easterner reflected over his answer.

"What at?" cried the others again.

"Oh, I don't know, but it seems to me this man has been reading dime-novels, and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it--the shootin' and stabbin' and all."

"But," said the cowboy, deeply scandalized, "this ain't Wyoming, ner none of them places. This is Nebrasker."

"Yes," added Johnnie, "an' why don't he wait till he gits _out West?_"

The travelled Easterner laughed. "It isn't different there even--not in these days. But he thinks he's right in the middle of hell."

Johnnie and the cowboy mused long.

"It's awful funny," remarked Johnnie at last.

"Yes," said the cowboy. "This is a queer game. I hope we don't git snowed in, because then we'd have to stand this here man bein' around with us all the time. That wouldn't be no good."

"I wish pop would throw him out," said Johnnie.

Presently they heard a loud stamping on the stairs, accompanied by ringing jokes in the voice of old Scully, and laughter, evidently from the Swede. The men around the stove stared vacantly at each other. "Gosh!" said the cowboy. The door flew open, and old Scully, flushed and anecdotal, came into the room. He was jabbering at the Swede, who followed him, laughing bravely. It was the entry of two roisterers from a banquet-hall.

"Come now," said Scully sharply to the three seated men, "move up and give us a chance at the stove." The cowboy and the Easterner obediently sidled their chairs to make room for the new-comers. Johnnie, however, simply arranged himself in a more indolent attitude, and then remained motionless.

"Come! Git over, there," said Scully.

"Plenty of room on the other side of the stove," said Johnnie.

"Do you think we want to sit in the draught?" roared the father.

But the Swede here interposed with a grandeur of confidence. "No, no. Let the boy sit where he likes," he cried in a bullying voice to the father.

"All right! All right!" said Scully, deferentially. The cowboy and the Easterner exchanged glances of wonder.

The five chairs were formed in a crescent about one side of the stove. The Swede began to talk; he talked arrogantly, profanely, angrily. Johnnie, the cowboy, and the Easterner maintained a morose silence, while old Scully appeared to be receptive and eager, breaking in constantly with sympathetic ejaculations.

Finally the Swede announced that he was thirsty. He moved in his chair, and said that he would go for a drink of water.

"I'll git it for you," cried Scully at once.

"No," said the Swede, contemptuously. "I'll get it for myself." He arose and stalked with the air of an owner off into the executive parts of the hotel.

As soon as the Swede was out of hearing Scully sprang to his feet and whispered intensely to the others: "Up-stairs he thought I was tryin' to poison 'im."

"Say," said Johnnie, "this makes me sick. Why don't you throw 'im out in the snow?"

"Why, he's all right now," declared Scully. "It was only that he was from the East, and he thought this was a tough place. That's all. He's all right now."

The cowboy looked with admiration upon the Easterner. "You were straight," he said. "You were on to that there Dutchman."

"Well," said Johnnie to his father, "he may be all right now, but I don't see it. Other time he was scared, but now he's too fresh."

Scully's speech was always a combination of Irish brogue and idiom, Western twang and idiom, and scraps of curiously formal diction taken from the story-books and newspapers. He now hurled a strange mass of language at the head of his son. "What do I keep? What do I keep? What do I keep?" he demanded, in a voice of thunder. He slapped his knee impressively, to indicate that he himself was going to make reply, and that all should heed. "I keep a hotel," he shouted. "A hotel, do you mind? A guest under my roof has sacred privileges. He is to be intimidated by none. Not one word shall he hear that would prejudice him in favor of goin' away. I'll not have it. There's no place in this here town where they can say they iver took in a guest of mine because he was afraid to stay here." He wheeled suddenly upon the cowboy and the Easterner. "Am I right?"

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the cowboy, "I think you're right."

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the Easterner, "I think you're right."

V

At six-o'clock supper, the Swede fizzed like a fire-wheel. He sometimes seemed on the point of bursting into riotous song, and in all his madness he was encouraged by old Scully. The Easterner was incased in reserve; the cowboy sat in wide-mouthed amazement, forgetting to eat, while Johnnie wrathily demolished great plates of food. The daughters of the house, when they were obliged to replenish the biscuits, approached as warily as Indians, and, having succeeded in their purpose, fled with ill-concealed trepidation. The Swede domineered the whole feast, and he gave it the appearance of a cruel bacchanal. He seemed to have grown suddenly taller; he gazed, brutally disdainful, into every face. His voice rang through the room. Once when he jabbed out harpoon-fashion with his fork to pinion a biscuit, the weapon nearly impaled the hand of the Easterner which had been stretched quietly out for the same biscuit.

After supper, as the men filed towards the other room, the Swede smote Scully ruthlessly on the shoulder. "Well, old boy, that was a good, square meal." Johnnie looked hopefully at his father; he knew that shoulder was tender from an old fall; and, indeed, it appeared for a moment as if Scully was going to flame out over the matter, but in the end he smiled a sickly smile and remained silent. The others understood from his manner that he was admitting his responsibility for the Swede's new view-point.

Johnnie, however, addressed his parent in an aside. "Why don't you license somebody to kick you down-stairs?" Scully scowled darkly by way of reply.

When they were gathered about the stove, the Swede insisted on another game of High Five. Scully gently deprecated the plan at first, but the Swede turned a wolfish glare upon him. The old man subsided, and the Swede canvassed the others. In his tone there was always a great threat. The cowboy and the Easterner both remarked indifferently that they would play. Scully said that he would presently have to go to meet the 6.58 train, and so the Swede turned menacingly upon Johnnie. For a moment their glances crossed like blades, and then Johnnie smiled and said, "Yes, I'll play."

They formed a square, with the little board on their knees. The Easterner and the Swede were again partners. As the play went on, it was noticeable that the cowboy was not board-whacking as usual. Meanwhile, Scully, near the lamp, had put on his spectacles and, with an appearance curiously like an old priest, was reading a newspaper. In time he went out to meet the 6.58 train, and, despite his precautions, a gust of polar wind whirled into the room as he opened the door. Besides scattering the cards, it dulled the players to the marrow. The Swede cursed frightfully. When Scully returned, his entrance disturbed a cosey and friendly scene. The Swede again cursed. But presently they were once more intent, their heads bent forward and their hands moving swiftly. The Swede had adopted the fashion of board-whacking.

Scully took up his paper and for a long time remained immersed in matters which were extraordinarily remote from him. The lamp burned

badly, and once he stopped to adjust the wick. The newspaper, as he turned from page to page, rustled with a slow and comfortable sound. Then suddenly he heard three terrible words: "You are cheatin'!"

Such scenes often prove that there can be little of dramatic import in environment. Any room can present a tragic front; any room can be comic. This little den was now hideous as a torture-chamber. The new faces of the men themselves had changed it upon the instant. The Swede held a huge fist in front of Johnnie's face, while the latter looked steadily over it into the blazing orbs of his accuser. The Easterner had grown pallid; the cowboy's jaw had dropped in that expression of bovine amazement which was one of his important mannerisms. After the three words, the first sound in the room was made by Scully's paper as it floated forgotten to his feet. His spectacles had also fallen from his nose, but by a clutch he had saved them in air. His hand, grasping the spectacles, now remained poised awkwardly and near his shoulder. He stared at the card-players.

Probably the silence was while a second elapsed. Then, if the floor had been suddenly twitched out from under the men they could not have moved quicker. The five had projected themselves headlong towards a common point. It happened that Johnnie, in rising to hurl himself upon the Swede, had stumbled slightly because of his curiously instinctive care for the cards and the board. The loss of the moment allowed time for the arrival of Scully, and also allowed the cowboy time to give the Swede a great push which sent him staggering back. The men found tongue together, and hoarse shouts of rage, appeal, or fear burst from every throat. The cowboy pushed and jostled feverishly at the Swede, and the Easterner and Scully clung wildly to Johnnie; but, through the smoky air, above the swaying bodies of the peace-compellers, the eyes of the two warriors ever sought each other in glances of challenge that were at once hot and steely.

Of course the board had been overturned, and now the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor, where the boots of the men trampled the fat and painted kings and queens as they gazed with their silly eyes at the war that was waging above them.

Scully's voice was dominating the yells. "Stop now? Stop, I say! Stop, now--"

Johnnie, as he struggled to burst through the rank formed by Scully and the Easterner, was crying, "Well, he says I cheated! He says I cheated! I won't allow no man to say I cheated! If he says I cheated, he's a -----!"

The cowboy was telling the Swede, "Quit, now! Quit, d'ye hear--"

The screams of the Swede never ceased: "He did cheat! I saw him! I saw him--"

As for the Easterner, he was importuning in a voice that was not heeded: "Wait a moment, can't you? Oh, wait a moment. What's the good of a fight over a game of cards? Wait a moment--"

In this tumult no complete sentences were clear. "Cheat"--"Quit"--"He says"--these fragments pierced the uproar and rang out sharply. It was remarkable that, whereas Scully undoubtedly made the most noise, he was the least heard of any of the riotous band.

Then suddenly there was a great cessation. It was as if each man had paused for breath; and although the room was still lighted with the anger of men, it could be seen that there was no danger of immediate conflict, and at once Johnnie, shouldering his way forward, almost succeeded in confronting the Swede. "What did you say I cheated for? What did you say I cheated for? I don't cheat, and I won't let no man say I do!"

The Swede said, "I saw you! I saw you!"

"Well," cried Johnnie, "I'll fight any man what says I cheat!"

"No, you won't," said the cowboy. "Not here."

"Ah, be still, can't you?" said Scully, coming between them.

The quiet was sufficient to allow the Easterner's voice to be heard. He was repealing, "Oh, wait a moment, can't you? What's the good of a fight over a game of cards? Wait a moment!"

Johnnie, his red face appearing above his father's shoulder, hailed the Swede again. "Did you say I cheated?"

The Swede showed his teeth. "Yes."

"Then," said Johnnie, "we must fight."

"Yes, fight," roared the Swede. He was like a demoniac. "Yes, fight! I'll show you what kind of a man I am! I'll show you who you want to fight! Maybe you think I can't fight! Maybe you think I can't! I'll show you, you skin, you card-sharp! Yes, you cheated! You cheated! You cheated!"

"Well, let's go at it, then, mister," said Johnnie, coolly.

The cowboy's brow was beaded with sweat from his efforts in intercepting all sorts of raids. He turned in despair to Scully. "What are you goin' to do now?"

A change had come over the Celtic visage of the old man. He now seemed all eagerness; his eyes glowed.

"We'll let them fight," he answered, stalwartly. "I can't put up with it any longer. I've stood this damned Swede till I'm sick. We'll let them fight."

VI

The men prepared to go out-of-doors. The Easterner was so nervous that he had great difficulty in getting his arms into the sleeves of his new leather coat. As the cowboy drew his fur cap down over his ears his hands trembled. In fact, Johnnie and old Scully were the only ones who displayed no agitation. These preliminaries were conducted without words.

Scully threw open the door. "Well, come on," he said. Instantly a terrific wind caused the flame of the lamp to struggle at its wick, while a puff of black smoke sprang from the chimney-top. The stove was

in mid-current of the blast, and its voice swelled to equal the roar of the storm. Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall. The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea.

No snow was falling, but great whirls and clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic winds, were streaming southward with the speed of bullets. The covered land was blue with the sheen of an unearthly satin, and there was no other hue save where, at the low, black railway station--which seemed incredibly distant--one light gleamed like a tiny jewel. As the men floundered into a thigh deep drift, it was known that the Swede was bawling out something. Scully went to him, put a hand on his shoulder and projected an ear. "What's that you say?" he shouted.

"I say," bawled the Swede again, "I won't stand much show against this gang. I know you'll all pitch on me."

Scully smote him reproachfully on the arm. "Tut, man!" he yelled. The wind tore the words from Scully's lips and scattered them far alee.

"You are all a gang of--" boomed the Swede, but the storm also seized the remainder of this sentence.

Immediately turning their backs upon the wind, the men had swung around a corner to the sheltered side of the hotel. It was the function of the little house to preserve here, amid this great devastation of snow, an irregular V-shape of heavily incrusting grass, which crackled beneath the feet. One could imagine the great drifts piled against the windward side. When the party reached the comparative peace of this spot it was found that the Swede was still bellowing.

"Oh, I know what kind of a thing this is! I know you'll all pitch on me. I can't lick you all!"

Scully turned upon him panther fashion. "You'll not have to whip all of us. You'll have to whip my son Johnnie. An' the man what troubles you durin' that time will have me to dale with."

The arrangements were swiftly made. The two men faced each other, obedient to the harsh commands of Scully, whose face, in the subtly luminous gloom, could be seen set in the austere impersonal lines that are pictured on the countenances of the Roman veterans. The Easterner's teeth were chattering, and he was hopping up and down like a mechanical toy. The cowboy stood rock-like.

The contestants had not stripped off any clothing. Each was in his ordinary attire. Their fists were up, and they eyed each other in a calm that had the elements of leonine cruelty in it.

During this pause, the Easterner's mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men--the iron-nerved master of the ceremony; the Swede, pale, motionless, terrible; and Johnnie, serene yet ferocious, brutish yet heroic. The entire prelude had in it a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action, and this aspect was accentuated by the long, mellow cry of the blizzard, as it sped the tumbling and wailing flakes into the black abyss of the south.

"Now!" said Scully.

The two combatants leaped forward and crashed together like bullocks. There was heard the cushioned sound of blows, and of a curse squeezing out from between the tight teeth of one.

As for the spectators, the Easterner's pent-up breath exploded from him with a pop of relief, absolute relief from the tension of the preliminaries. The cowboy bounded into the air with a yowl. Scully was immovable as from supreme amazement and fear at the fury of the fight which he himself had permitted and arranged.

For a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly revolving wheel. Occasionally a face, as if illumined by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots. A moment later, the men might have been known as shadows, if it were not for the involuntary utterance of oaths that came from them in whispers.

Suddenly a holocaust of warlike desire caught the cowboy, and he bolted forward with the speed of a broncho. "Go it, Johnnie! go it!

Kill him! Kill him!"

Scully confronted him. "Kape back," he said; and by his glance the cowboy could tell that this man was Johnnie's father.

To the Easterner there was a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination. This confused mingling was eternal to his sense, which was concentrated in a longing for the end, the priceless end. Once the fighters lurched near him, and as he scrambled hastily backward he heard them breathe like men on the rack.

"Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" The cowboy's face was contorted like one of those agony masks in museums.

"Keep still," said Scully, icily.

Then there was a sudden loud grunt, incomplete, cut short, and Johnnie's body swung away from the Swede and fell with sickening heaviness to the grass. The cowboy was barely in time to prevent the mad Swede from flinging himself upon his prone adversary. "No, you don't," said the cowboy, interposing an arm. "Wait a second."

Scully was at his son's side. "Johnnie! Johnnie, me boy!" His voice had a quality of melancholy tenderness. "Johnnie! Can you go on with it?" He looked anxiously down into the bloody, pulpy face of his son.

There was a moment of silence, and then Johnnie answered in his ordinary voice, "Yes, I--it--yes."

Assisted by his father he struggled to his feet. "Wait a bit now till you git your wind," said the old man.

A few paces away the cowboy was lecturing the Swede. "No, you don't! Wait a second!"

The Easterner was plucking at Scully's sleeve. "Oh, this is enough," he pleaded. "This is enough! Let it go as it stands. This is enough!"

"Bill," said Scully, "git out of the road." The cowboy stepped aside. "Now." The combatants were actuated by a new caution as they advanced

towards collision. They glared at each other, and then the Swede aimed a lightning blow that carried with it his entire weight. Johnnie was evidently half stupid from weakness, but he miraculously dodged, and his fist sent the over-balanced Swede sprawling.

The cowboy, Scully, and the Easterner burst into a cheer that was like a chorus of triumphant soldiery, but before its conclusion the Swede had scuffled agilely to his feet and come in berserk abandon at his foe. There was another perplexity of flying arms, and Johnnie's body again swung away and fell, even as a bundle might fall from a roof. The Swede instantly staggered to a little wind-waved tree and leaned upon it, breathing like an engine, while his savage and flame-lit eyes roamed from face to face as the men bent over Johnnie. There was a splendor of isolation in his situation at this time which the Easterner felt once when, lifting his eyes from the man on the ground, he beheld that mysterious and lonely figure, waiting.

"Arc you any good yet, Johnnie?" asked Scully in a broken voice.

The son gasped and opened his eyes languidly. After a moment he answered, "No--I ain't--any good--any--more." Then, from shame and bodily ill he began to weep, the tears furrowing down through the blood-stains on his face. "He was too--too--too heavy for me."

Scully straightened and addressed the waiting figure. "Stranger," he said, evenly, "it's all up with our side." Then his voice changed into that vibrant huskiness which is commonly the tone of the most simple and deadly announcements. "Johnnie is whipped."

Without replying, the victor moved off on the route to the front door of the hotel.

The cowboy was formulating new and un-spellable blasphemies. The Easterner was startled to find that they were out in a wind that seemed to come direct from the shadowed arctic floes. He heard again the wail of the snow as it was flung to its grave in the south. He knew now that all this time the cold had been sinking into him deeper and deeper, and he wondered that he had not perished. He felt indifferent to the condition of the vanquished man.

"Johnnie, can you walk?" asked Scully.

"Did I hurt--hurt him any?" asked the son.

"Can you walk, boy? Can you walk?"

Johnnie's voice was suddenly strong. There was a robust impatience in it. "I asked you whether I hurt him any!"

"Yes, yes, Johnnie," answered the cowboy, consolingly; "he's hurt a good deal."

They raised him from the ground, and as soon as he was on his feet he went tottering off, rebuffing all attempts at assistance. When the party rounded the corner they were fairly blinded by the pelting of the snow. It burned their faces like fire. The cowboy carried Johnnie through the drift to the door. As they entered some cards again rose from the floor and beat against the wall.

The Easterner rushed to the stove. He was so profoundly chilled that he almost dared to embrace the glowing iron. The Swede was not in the room. Johnnie sank into a chair, and, folding his arms on his knees, buried his face in them. Scully, warming one foot and then the other at a rim of the stove, muttered to himself with Celtic mournfulness. The cowboy had removed his fur cap, and with a dazed and rueful air he was running one hand through his tousled locks. From overhead they could hear the creaking of boards, as the Swede tramped here and there in his room.

The sad quiet was broken by the sudden flinging open of a door that led towards the kitchen. It was instantly followed by an inrush of women. They precipitated themselves upon Johnnie amid a chorus of lamentation. Before they carried their prey off to the kitchen, there to be bathed and harangued with that mixture of sympathy and abuse which is a feat of their sex, the mother straightened herself and fixed old Scully with an eye of stern reproach. "Shame be upon you, Patrick Scully!" she cried. "Your own son, too. Shame be upon you!"

"There, now! Be quiet, now!" said the old man, weakly.

"Shame be upon you, Patrick Scully!" The girls, rallying to this slogan, sniffed disdainfully in the direction of those trembling accomplices, the cowboy and the Easterner. Presently they bore Johnnie away, and left the three men to dismal reflection.

VII

"I'd like to fight this here Dutchman myself," said the cowboy, breaking a long silence.

Scully wagged his head sadly. "No, that wouldn't do. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be right."

"Well, why wouldn't it?" argued the cowboy. "I don't see no harm in it."

"No," answered Scully, with mournful heroism. "It wouldn't be right. It was Johnnie's fight, and now we mustn't whip the man just because he whipped Johnnie."

"Yes, that's true enough," said the cowboy; "but--he better not get fresh with me, because I couldn't stand no more of it."

"You'll not say a word to him," commanded Scully, and even then they heard the tread of the Swede on the stairs. His entrance was made theatric. He swept the door back with a bang and swaggered to the middle of the room. No one looked at him. "Well," he cried, insolently, at Scully, "I s'pose you'll tell me now how much I owe you?"

The old man remained stolid. "You don't owe me nothin'."

"Huh!" said the Swede, "huh! Don't owe 'im nothin'."

The cowboy addressed the Swede. "Stranger, I don't see how you come to be so gay around here."

Old Scully was instantly alert. "Stop!" he shouted, holding his hand

forth, fingers upward. "Bill, you shut up!"

The cowboy spat carelessly into the sawdust box. "I didn't say a word, did I?" he asked.

"Mr. Scully," called the Swede, "how much do I owe you?" It was seen that he was attired for departure, and that he had his valise in his hand.

"You don't owe me nothin'," repeated Scully in his same imperturbable way.

"Huh!" said the Swede. "I guess you're right. I guess if it was any way at all, you'd owe me somethin'. That's what I guess." He turned to the cowboy. "'Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!'" he mimicked, and then guffawed victoriously. "'Kill him!'" He was convulsed with ironical humor.

But he might have been jeering the dead. The three men were immovable and silent, staring with glassy eyes at the stove.

The Swede opened the door and passed into the storm, giving one derisive glance backward at the still group.

As soon as the door was closed, Scully and the cowboy leaped to their feet and began to curse. They trampled to and fro, waving their arms and smashing into the air with their fists. "Oh, but that was a hard minute!" wailed Scully. "That was a hard minute! Him there leerin' and scoffin'! One bang at his nose was worth forty dollars to me that minute! How did you stand it, Bill?"

"How did I stand it?" cried the cowboy in a quivering voice. "How did I stand it? Oh!"

The old man burst into sudden brogue. "I'd loike to take that Swade," he wailed, "and hould 'im down on a shtone flure and bate 'im to a jelly wid a shtick!"

The cowboy groaned in sympathy. "I'd like to git him by the neck and ha-ammer him "--he brought his hand down on a chair with a noise like

a pistol-shot--"hammer that there Dutchman until he couldn't tell himself from a dead coyote!"

"I'd bate 'im until he--"

"I'd show _him_ some things--"

And then together they raised a yearning, fanatic cry--"Oh-o-oh! if we only could--"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"And then I'd--"

"O-o-oh!"

VIII

The Swede, tightly gripping his valise, tacked across the face of the storm as if he carried sails. He was following a line of little naked, gasping trees, which he knew must mark the way of the road. His face, fresh from the pounding of Johnnie's fists, felt more pleasure than pain in the wind and the driving snow. A number of square shapes loomed upon him finally, and he knew them as the houses of the main body of the town. He found a street and made travel along it, leaning heavily upon the wind whenever, at a corner, a terrific blast caught him.

He might have been in a deserted village. We picture the world as thick with conquering and elate humanity, but here, with the bugles of the tempest pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. One was a coxcomb not to die in it. However, the Swede found a saloon.

In front of it an indomitable red light was burning, and the snow-flakes were made blood color as they flew through the circumscribed territory of the lamp's shining. The Swede pushed open the door of the saloon and entered. A sanded expanse was before him, and at the end of it four men sat about a table drinking. Down one side of the room extended a radiant bar, and its guardian was leaning upon his elbows listening to the talk of the men at the table. The Swede dropped his valise upon the floor, and, smiling fraternally upon the barkeeper, said, "Gimme some whiskey, will you?" The man placed a bottle, a whiskey-glass, and a glass of ice-thick water upon the bar. The Swede poured himself an abnormal portion of whiskey and drank it in three gulps. "Pretty bad night," remarked the bartender, indifferently. He was making the pretension of blindness which is usually a distinction of his class; but it could have been seen that he was furtively studying the half-erased blood-stains on the face of the Swede. "Bad night," he said again.

"Oh, it's good enough for me," replied the Swede, hardily, as he poured himself some more whiskey. The barkeeper took his coin and maneuvered it through its reception by the highly nickelled cash-machine. A bell rang; a card labelled "20 cts." had appeared.

"No," continued the Swede, "this isn't too bad weather. It's good enough for me."

"So?" murmured the barkeeper, languidly.

The copious drams made the Swede's eyes swim, and he breathed a trifle heavier. "Yes, I like this weather. I like it. It suits me." It was apparently his design to impart a deep significance to these words.

"So?" murmured the bartender again. He turned to gaze dreamily at the scroll-like birds and bird-like scrolls which had been drawn with soap upon the mirrors back of the bar.

"Well, I guess I'll take another drink," said the Swede, presently. "Have something?"

"No, thanks; I'm not drinkin'," answered the bartender. Afterwards he

asked, "How did you hurt your face?"

The Swede immediately began to boast loudly. "Why, in a fight. I thumped the soul out of a man down here at Scully's hotel."

The interest of the four men at the table was at last aroused.

"Who was it?" said one.

"Johnnie Scully," blustered the Swede. "Son of the man what runs it. He will be pretty near dead for some weeks, I can tell you. I made a nice thing of him, I did. He couldn't get up. They carried him in the house. Have a drink?"

Instantly the men in some subtle way incased themselves in reserve. "No, thanks," said one. The group was of curious formation. Two were prominent local business men; one was the district-attorney; and one was a professional gambler of the kind known as "square." But a scrutiny of the group would not have enabled an observer to pick the gambler from the men of more reputable pursuits. He was, in fact, a man so delicate in manner, when among people of fair class, and so judicious in his choice of victims, that in the strictly masculine part of the town's life he had come to be explicitly trusted and admired. People called him a thoroughbred. The fear and contempt with which his craft was regarded was undoubtedly the reason that his quiet dignity shone conspicuous above the quiet dignity of men who might be merely hatters, billiard markers, or grocery-clerks. Beyond an occasional unwary traveller, who came by rail, this gambler was supposed to prey solely upon reckless and senile farmers, who, when flush with good crops, drove into town in all the pride and confidence of an absolutely invulnerable stupidity. Hearing at times in circuitous fashion of the despoilment of such a farmer, the important men of Romper invariably laughed in contempt of the victim, and, if they thought of the wolf at all, it was with a kind of pride at the knowledge that he would never dare think of attacking their wisdom and courage. Besides, it was popular that this gambler had a real wife and two real children in a neat cottage in a suburb, where he led an exemplary home life; and when any one even suggested a discrepancy in his character, the crowd immediately vociferated descriptions of this virtuous family circle. Then men who led exemplary home lives, and men

who did not lead exemplary home lives, all subsided in a bunch, remarking that there was nothing more to be said.

However, when a restriction was placed upon him--as, for instance, when a strong clique of members of the new Pollywog Club refused to permit him, even as a spectator, to appear in the rooms of the organization--the candor and gentleness with which he accepted the judgment disarmed many of his foes and made his friends more desperately partisan. He invariably distinguished between himself and a respectable Romper man so quickly and frankly that his manner actually appeared to be a continual broadcast compliment.

And one must not forget to declare the fundamental fact of his entire position in Romper. It is irrefutable that in all affairs outside of his business, in all matters that occur eternally and commonly between man and man, this thieving card-player was so generous, so just, so moral, that, in a contest, he could have put to flight the consciences of nine-tenths of the citizens of Romper.

And so it happened that he was seated in this saloon with the two prominent local merchants and the district-attorney.

The Swede continued to drink raw whiskey, meanwhile babbling at the barkeeper and trying to induce him to indulge in potations. "Come on. Have a drink. Come on. What--no? Well, have a little one, then. By gawd, I've whipped a man to-night, and I want to celebrate. I whipped him good, too. Gentlemen," the Swede cried to the men at the table, "have a drink?"

"Ssh!" said the barkeeper.

The group at the table, although furtively attentive, had been pretending to be deep in talk, but now a man lifted his eyes towards the Swede and said, shortly, "Thanks. We don't want any more."

At this reply the Swede ruffled out his chest like a rooster. "Well," he exploded, "it seems I can't get anybody to drink with me in this town. Seems so, don't it? Well!"

"Ssh!" said the barkeeper.

"Say," snarled the Swede, "don't you try to shut me up. I won't have it. I'm a gentleman, and I want people to drink with me. And I want 'em to drink with me now. _Now_--do you understand?" He rapped the bar with his knuckles.

Years of experience had calloused the bartender. He merely grew sulky. "I hear you," he answered.

"Well," cried the Swede, "listen hard then. See those men over there? Well, they're going to drink with me, and don't you forget it. Now you watch."

"Hi!" yelled the barkeeper, "this won't do!"

"Why won't it?" demanded the Swede. He stalked over to the table, and by chance laid his hand upon the shoulder of the gambler. "How about this?" he asked, wrathfully. "I asked you to drink with me."

The gambler simply twisted his head and spoke over his shoulder. "My friend, I don't know you."

"Oh, hell!" answered the Swede, "come and have a drink."

"Now, my boy," advised the gambler, kindly, "take your hand off my shoulder and go 'way and mind your own business." He was a little, slim man, and it seemed strange to hear him use this tone of heroic patronage to the burly Swede. The other men at the table said nothing.

"What! You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'll make you then! I'll make you!" The Swede had grasped the gambler frenziedly at the throat, and was dragging him from his chair. The other men sprang up. The barkeeper dashed around the corner of his bar. There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

The prominent merchants and the district attorney must have at once tumbled out of the place backward. The bartender found himself hanging

limply to the arm of a chair and gazing into the eyes of a murderer.

"Henry," said the latter, as he wiped his knife on one of the towels that hung beneath the bar-rail, "you tell 'em where to find me. I'll be home, waiting for 'em." Then he vanished. A moment afterwards the barkeeper was in the street dinning through the storm for help, and, moreover, companionship.

The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash-machine: "This registers the amount of your purchase."

IX

Months later, the cowboy was frying pork over the stove of a little ranch near the Dakota line, when there was a quick thud of hoofs outside, and presently the Easterner entered with the letters and the papers.

"Well," said the Easterner at once, "the chap that killed the Swede has got three years. Wasn't much, was it?"

"He has? Three years?" The cowboy poised his pan of pork, while he ruminated upon the news. "Three years. That ain't much."

"No. It was a light sentence," replied the Easterner as he unbuckled his spurs. "Seems there was a good deal of sympathy for him in Romper."

"If the bartender had been any good," observed the cowboy, thoughtfully, "he would have gone in and cracked that there Dutchman on the head with a bottle in the beginnin' of it and stopped all this here murderin'."

"Yes, a thousand things might have happened," said the Easterner, tartly.

The cowboy returned his pan of pork to the fire, but his philosophy

continued. "It's funny, ain't it? If he hadn't said Johnnie was cheatin' he'd be alive this minute. He was an awful fool. Game played for fun, too. Not for money. I believe he was crazy."

"I feel sorry for that gambler," said the Easterner.

"Oh, so do I," said the cowboy. "He don't deserve none of it for killin' who he did."

"The Swede might not have been killed if everything had been square."

"Might not have been killed?" exclaimed the cowboy. "Everythin' square? Why, when he said that Johnnie was cheatin' and acted like such a jackass? And then in the saloon he fairly walked up to git hurt?" With these arguments the cowboy browbeat the Easterner and reduced him to rage.

"You're a fool!" cried the Easterner, viciously. "You're a bigger jackass than the Swede by a million majority. Now let me tell you one thing. Let me tell you something. Listen! Johnnie was cheating!"

"Johnnie," said the cowboy, blankly. There was a minute of silence, and then he said, robustly, "Why, no. The game was only for fun."

"Fun or not," said the Easterner, "Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it. I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone. And you--you were simply puffing around the place and wanting to fight. And then old Scully himself! We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women really involved in every murder, but in this case it seems to be only five men--you, I, Johnnie, old Scully, and that fool of an unfortunate gambler came merely as a culmination, the apex of a human movement, and gets all the punishment."

The cowboy, injured and rebellious, cried out blindly into this fog of mysterious theory: "Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?"



THE MYSTERIOUS PORTRAIT

By Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol

From Project Gutenberg's *Taras Bulba and Other Tales*

PART I

Nowhere did so many people pause as before the little picture-shop in the Shtchukinui Dvor. This little shop contained, indeed, the most varied collection of curiosities. The pictures were chiefly oil-paintings covered with dark varnish, in frames of dingy yellow. Winter scenes with white trees; very red sunsets, like raging conflagrations, a Flemish boor, more like a turkey-cock in cuffs than a human being, were the prevailing subjects. To these must be added a few engravings, such as a portrait of Khozreff-Mirza in a sheepskin cap, and some generals with three-cornered hats and hooked noses. Moreover, the doors of such shops are usually festooned with bundles of those publications, printed on large sheets of bark, and then coloured by hand, which bear witness to the native talent of the Russian.

On one was the Tzarevna Miliktrisa Kirbitievna; on another the city of Jerusalem. There are usually but few purchasers of these productions, but gazers are many. Some truant lackey probably yawns in front of them, holding in his hand the dishes containing dinner from the cook-shop for his master, who will not get his soup very hot. Before them, too, will most likely be standing a soldier wrapped in his cloak, a dealer from the old-clothes mart, with a couple of penknives for sale, and a huckstress, with a basketful of shoes. Each expresses admiration in his own way. The muzhiks generally touch them with their fingers; the dealers gaze seriously at them; serving boys and apprentices laugh, and tease each other with the coloured caricatures; old lackeys in frieze cloaks look at them merely for the sake of yawning away their time somewhere; and the hucksters, young Russian women, halt by instinct to hear what people are gossiping about, and to see what they are looking at.

At the time our story opens, the young painter, Tchartkoff, paused involuntarily as he passed the shop. His old cloak and plain attire showed him to be a man who was devoted to his art with self-denying zeal, and who had no time to trouble himself about his clothes. He halted in front of the little shop, and at first enjoyed an inward laugh over the monstrosities in the shape of pictures.

At length he sank unconsciously into a reverie, and began to ponder as to what sort of people wanted these productions? It did not seem remarkable to him that the Russian populace should gaze with rapture upon "Eruslanoff Lazarevitch," on "The Glutton" and "The Carouser," on "Thoma and Erema." The delineations of these subjects were easily intelligible to the masses. But where were there purchases for those streaky, dirty oil-paintings? Who needed those Flemish boors, those red and blue landscapes, which put forth some claims to a higher stage of art, but which really expressed the depths of its degradation? They did not appear the works of a self-taught child. In that case, in spite of the caricature of drawing, a sharp distinction would have manifested itself. But here were visible only simple dullness, steady-going incapacity, which stood, through self-will, in the ranks of art, while its true place was among the lowest trades. The same colours, the same manner, the same practised hand, belonging rather to a manufacturing automaton than to a man!

He stood before the dirty pictures for some time, his thoughts at length wandering to other matters. Meanwhile the proprietor of the shop, a little grey man, in a frieze cloak, with a beard which had not been shaved since Sunday, had been urging him to buy for some time, naming prices, without even knowing what pleased him or what he wanted. "Here, I'll take a silver piece for these peasants and this little landscape. What painting! it fairly dazzles one; only just received from the factory; the varnish isn't dry yet. Or here is a winter scene--take the winter scene; fifteen rubles; the frame alone is worth it. What a winter scene!" Here the merchant gave a slight fillip to the canvas, as if to demonstrate all the merits of the winter scene. "Pray have them put up and sent to your house. Where do you live? Here, boy, give me some string!"

"Hold, not so fast!" said the painter, coming to himself, and perceiving

that the brisk dealer was beginning in earnest to pack some pictures up. He was rather ashamed not to take anything after standing so long in front of the shop; so saying, "Here, stop! I will see if there is anything I want here!" he stooped and began to pick up from the floor, where they were thrown in a heap, some worn, dusty old paintings. There were old family portraits, whose descendants, probably could not be found on earth; with torn canvas and frames minus their gilding; in short, trash. But the painter began his search, thinking to himself, "Perhaps I may come across something." He had heard stories about pictures of the great masters having been found among the rubbish in cheap print-sellers' shops.

The dealer, perceiving what he was about, ceased his importunities, and took up his post again at the door, hailing the passers-by with, "Hither, friends, here are pictures; step in, step in; just received from the makers!" He shouted his fill, and generally in vain, had a long talk with a rag-merchant, standing opposite, at the door of his shop; and finally, recollecting that he had a customer in his shop, turned his back on the public and went inside. "Well, friend, have you chosen anything?" said he. But the painter had already been standing motionless for some time before a portrait in a large and originally magnificent frame, upon which, however, hardly a trace of gilding now remained.

It represented an old man, with a thin, bronzed face and high cheek-bones; the features seemingly depicted in a moment of convulsive agitation. He wore a flowing Asiatic costume. Dusty and defaced as the portrait was, Tchartkoff saw, when he had succeeded in removing the dirt from the face, traces of the work of a great artist. The portrait appeared to be unfinished, but the power of the handling was striking. The eyes were the most remarkable picture of all: it seemed as though the full power of the artist's brush had been lavished upon them. They fairly gazed out of the portrait, destroying its harmony with their strange liveliness. When he carried the portrait to the door, the eyes gleamed even more penetratingly. They produced nearly the same impression on the public. A woman standing behind him exclaimed, "He is looking, he is looking!" and jumped back. Tchartkoff experienced an unpleasant feeling, inexplicable even to himself, and placed the portrait on the floor.

"Well, will you take the portrait?" said the dealer.

"How much is it?" said the painter.

"Why chaffer over it? give me seventy-five kopeks."

"No."

"Well, how much will you give?"

"Twenty kopeks," said the painter, preparing to go.

"What a price! Why, you couldn't buy the frame for that! Perhaps you will decide to purchase to-morrow. Sir, sir, turn back! Add ten kopeks. Take it, take it! give me twenty kopeks. To tell the truth, you are my only customer to-day, and that's the only reason."

Thus Tchartkoff quite unexpectedly became the purchaser of the old portrait, and at the same time reflected, "Why have I bought it? What is it to me?" But there was nothing to be done. He pulled a twenty-kopek piece from his pocket, gave it to the merchant, took the portrait under his arm, and carried it home. On the way thither, he remembered that the twenty-kopek piece he had given for it was his last. His thoughts at once became gloomy. Vexation and careless indifference took possession of him at one and the same moment. The red light of sunset still lingered in one half the sky; the houses facing that way still gleamed with its warm light; and meanwhile the cold blue light of the moon grew brighter. Light, half-transparent shadows fell in bands upon the ground. The painter began by degrees to glance up at the sky, flushed with a transparent light; and at the same moment from his mouth fell the words, "What a delicate tone! What a nuisance! Deuce take it!" Re-adjusting the portrait, which kept slipping from under his arm, he quickened his pace.

Weary and bathed in perspiration, he dragged himself to Vasilievsky Ostroff. With difficulty and much panting he made his way up the stairs flooded with soap-suds, and adorned with the tracks of dogs and cats. To his knock there was no answer: there was no one at home. He leaned against the window, and disposed himself to wait patiently, until at last there resounded behind him the footsteps of a boy in a blue blouse, his servant, model, and colour-grinder. This boy was called Nikita, and spent all his time in the streets when his master was not at home.

Nikita tried for a long time to get the key into the lock, which was quite invisible, by reason of the darkness.

Finally the door was opened. Tchartkoff entered his ante-room, which was intolerably cold, as painters' rooms always are, which fact, however, they do not notice. Without giving Nikita his coat, he went on into his studio, a large room, but low, fitted up with all sorts of artistic rubbish--plaster hands, canvases, sketches begun and discarded, and draperies thrown over chairs. Feeling very tired, he took off his cloak, placed the portrait abstractedly between two small canvasses, and threw himself on the narrow divan. Having stretched himself out, he finally called for a light.

"There are no candles," said Nikita.

"What, none?"

"And there were none last night," said Nikita. The artist recollected that, in fact, there had been no candles the previous evening, and became silent. He let Nikita take his coat off, and put on his old worn dressing-gown.

"There has been a gentleman here," said Nikita.

"Yes, he came for money, I know," said the painter, waving his hand.

"He was not alone," said Nikita.

"Who else was with him?"

"I don't know, some police officer or other."

"But why a police officer?"

"I don't know why, but he says because your rent is not paid."

"Well, what will come of it?"

"I don't know what will come of it: he said, 'If he won't pay, why, let him leave the rooms.' They are both coming again to-morrow."

"Let them come," said Tchartkoff, with indifference; and a gloomy mood took full possession of him.

Young Tchartkoff was an artist of talent, which promised great things: his work gave evidence of observation, thought, and a strong inclination to approach nearer to nature.

"Look here, my friend," his professor said to him more than once, "you have talent; it will be a shame if you waste it: but you are impatient; you have but to be attracted by anything, to fall in love with it, you become engrossed with it, and all else goes for nothing, and you won't even look at it. See to it that you do not become a fashionable artist. At present your colouring begins to assert itself too loudly; and your drawing is at times quite weak; you are already striving after the fashionable style, because it strikes the eye at once. Have a care! society already begins to have its attraction for you: I have seen you with a shiny hat, a foppish neckerchief.... It is seductive to paint fashionable little pictures and portraits for money; but talent is ruined, not developed, by that means. Be patient; think out every piece of work, discard your foppishness; let others amass money, your own will not fail you."

The professor was partly right. Our artist sometimes wanted to enjoy himself, to play the fop, in short, to give vent to his youthful impulses in some way or other; but he could control himself withal. At times he would forget everything, when he had once taken his brush in his hand, and could not tear himself from it except as from a delightful dream. His taste perceptibly developed. He did not as yet understand all the depths of Raphael, but he was attracted by Guido's broad and rapid handling, he paused before Titian's portraits, he delighted in the Flemish masters. The dark veil enshrouding the ancient pictures had not yet wholly passed away from before them; but he already saw something in them, though in private he did not agree with the professor that the secrets of the old masters are irremediably lost to us. It seemed to him that the nineteenth century had improved upon them considerably, that the delineation of nature was more clear, more vivid, more close. It sometimes vexed him when he saw how a strange artist, French or German, sometimes not even a painter by profession, but only a skilful dauber, produced, by the celerity of his brush and the vividness of his

colouring, a universal commotion, and amassed in a twinkling a funded capital. This did not occur to him when fully occupied with his own work, for then he forgot food and drink and all the world. But when dire want arrived, when he had no money wherewith to buy brushes and colours, when his implacable landlord came ten times a day to demand the rent for his rooms, then did the luck of the wealthy artists recur to his hungry imagination; then did the thought which so often traverses Russian minds, to give up altogether, and go down hill, utterly to the bad, traverse his. And now he was almost in this frame of mind.

"Yes, it is all very well, to be patient, be patient!" he exclaimed, with vexation; "but there is an end to patience at last. Be patient! but what money have I to buy a dinner with to-morrow? No one will lend me any. If I did bring myself to sell all my pictures and sketches, they would not give me twenty kopeks for the whole of them. They are useful; I feel that not one of them has been undertaken in vain; I have learned something from each one. Yes, but of what use is it? Studies, sketches, all will be studies, trial-sketches to the end. And who will buy, not even knowing me by name? Who wants drawings from the antique, or the life class, or my unfinished love of a Psyche, or the interior of my room, or the portrait of Nikita, though it is better, to tell the truth, than the portraits by any of the fashionable artists? Why do I worry, and toil like a learner over the alphabet, when I might shine as brightly as the rest, and have money, too, like them?"

Thus speaking, the artist suddenly shuddered, and turned pale. A convulsively distorted face gazed at him, peeping forth from the surrounding canvas; two terrible eyes were fixed straight upon him; on the mouth was written a menacing command of silence. Alarmed, he tried to scream and summon Nikita, who already was snoring in the ante-room; but he suddenly paused and laughed. The sensation of fear died away in a moment; it was the portrait he had bought, and which he had quite forgotten. The light of the moon illuminating the chamber had fallen upon it, and lent it a strange likeness to life.

He began to examine it. He moistened a sponge with water, passed it over the picture several times, washed off nearly all the accumulated and incrustated dust and dirt, hung it on the wall before him, wondering yet more at the remarkable workmanship. The whole face had gained new life, and the eyes gazed at him so that he shuddered; and, springing back,

he exclaimed in a voice of surprise: "It looks with human eyes!" Then suddenly there occurred to him a story he had heard long before from his professor, of a certain portrait by the renowned Leonardo da Vinci, upon which the great master laboured several years, and still regarded as incomplete, but which, according to Vasari, was nevertheless deemed by all the most complete and finished product of his art. The most finished thing about it was the eyes, which amazed his contemporaries; the very smallest, barely visible veins in them being reproduced on the canvas.

But in the portrait now before him there was something singular. It was no longer art; it even destroyed the harmony of the portrait; they were living, human eyes! It seemed as though they had been cut from a living man and inserted. Here was none of that high enjoyment which takes possession of the soul at the sight of an artist's production, no matter how terrible the subject he may have chosen.

Again he approached the portrait, in order to observe those wondrous eyes, and perceived, with terror, that they were gazing at him. This was no copy from Nature; it was life, the strange life which might have lighted up the face of a dead man, risen from the grave. Whether it was the effect of the moonlight, which brought with it fantastic thoughts, and transformed things into strange likenesses, opposed to those of matter-of-fact day, or from some other cause, but it suddenly became terrible to him, he knew not why, to sit alone in the room. He drew back from the portrait, turned aside, and tried not to look at it; but his eye involuntarily, of its own accord, kept glancing sideways towards it. Finally, he became afraid to walk about the room. It seemed as though some one were on the point of stepping up behind him; and every time he turned, he glanced timidly back. He had never been a coward; but his imagination and nerves were sensitive, and that evening he could not explain his involuntary fear. He seated himself in one corner, but even then it seemed to him that some one was peeping over his shoulder into his face. Even Nikita's snores, resounding from the ante-room, did not chase away his fear. At length he rose from the seat, without raising his eyes, went behind a screen, and lay down on his bed. Through the cracks of the screen he saw his room lit up by the moon, and the portrait hanging stiffly on the wall. The eyes were fixed upon him in a yet more terrible and significant manner, and it seemed as if they would not look at anything but himself. Overpowered with a feeling of oppression, he decided to rise from his bed, seized a sheet, and,

approaching the portrait, covered it up completely.

Having done this, he lay down more at ease on his bed, and began to meditate upon the poverty and pitiful lot of the artist, and the thorny path lying before him in the world. But meanwhile his eye glanced involuntarily through the joint of the screen at the portrait muffled in the sheet. The light of the moon heightened the whiteness of the sheet, and it seemed to him as though those terrible eyes shone through the cloth. With terror he fixed his eyes more steadfastly on the spot, as if wishing to convince himself that it was all nonsense. But at length he saw--saw clearly; there was no longer a sheet--the portrait was quite uncovered, and was gazing beyond everything around it, straight at him; gazing as it seemed fairly into his heart. His heart grew cold. He watched anxiously; the old man moved, and suddenly, supporting himself on the frame with both arms, raised himself by his hands, and, putting forth both feet, leapt out of the frame. Through the crack of the screen, the empty frame alone was now visible. Footsteps resounded through the room, and approached nearer and nearer to the screen. The poor artist's heart began beating fast. He expected every moment, his breath failing for fear, that the old man would look round the screen at him. And lo! he did look from behind the screen, with the very same bronzed face, and with his big eyes roving about.

Tchartkoff tried to scream, and felt that his voice was gone; he tried to move; his limbs refused their office. With open mouth, and failing breath, he gazed at the tall phantom, draped in some kind of a flowing Asiatic robe, and waited for what it would do. The old man sat down almost on his very feet, and then pulled out something from among the folds of his wide garment. It was a purse. The old man untied it, took it by the end, and shook it. Heavy rolls of coin fell out with a dull thud upon the floor. Each was wrapped in blue paper, and on each was marked, "1000 ducats." The old man protruded his long, bony hand from his wide sleeves, and began to undo the rolls. The gold glittered. Great as was the artist's unreasoning fear, he concentrated all his attention upon the gold, gazing motionless, as it made its appearance in the bony hands, gleamed, rang lightly or dully, and was wrapped up again. Then he perceived one packet which had rolled farther than the rest, to the very leg of his bedstead, near his pillow. He grasped it almost convulsively, and glanced in fear at the old man to see whether he noticed it.

But the old man appeared very much occupied: he collected all his rolls, replaced them in the purse, and went outside the screen without looking at him. Tchartkoff's heart beat wildly as he heard the rustle of the retreating footsteps sounding through the room. He clasped the roll of coin more closely in his hand, quivering in every limb. Suddenly he heard the footsteps approaching the screen again. Apparently the old man had recollected that one roll was missing. Lo! again he looked round the screen at him. The artist in despair grasped the roll with all his strength, tried with all his power to make a movement, shrieked--and awoke.

He was bathed in a cold perspiration; his heart beat as hard as it was possible for it to beat; his chest was oppressed, as though his last breath was about to issue from it. "Was it a dream?" he said, seizing his head with both hands. But the terrible reality of the apparition did not resemble a dream. As he woke, he saw the old man step into the frame: the skirts of the flowing garment even fluttered, and his hand felt plainly that a moment before it had held something heavy. The moonlight lit up the room, bringing out from the dark corners here a canvas, there the model of a hand: a drapery thrown over a chair; trousers and dirty boots. Then he perceived that he was not lying in his bed, but standing upright in front of the portrait. How he had come there, he could not in the least comprehend. Still more surprised was he to find the portrait uncovered, and with actually no sheet over it. Motionless with terror, he gazed at it, and perceived that the living, human eyes were fastened upon him. A cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead. He wanted to move away, but felt that his feet had in some way become rooted to the earth. And he felt that this was not a dream. The old man's features moved, and his lips began to project towards him, as though he wanted to suck him in. With a yell of despair he jumped back--and awoke.

"Was it a dream?" With his heart throbbing to bursting, he felt about him with both hands. Yes, he was lying in bed, and in precisely the position in which he had fallen asleep. Before him stood the screen. The moonlight flooded the room. Through the crack of the screen, the portrait was visible, covered with the sheet, as it should be, just as he had covered it. And so that, too, was a dream? But his clenched fist still felt as though something had been held in it. The throbbing of his heart was violent, almost terrible; the weight upon his breast

intolerable. He fixed his eyes upon the crack, and stared steadfastly at the sheet. And lo! he saw plainly the sheet begin to open, as though hands were pushing from underneath, and trying to throw it off. "Lord God, what is it!" he shrieked, crossing himself in despair--and awoke.

And was this, too, a dream? He sprang from his bed, half-mad, and could not comprehend what had happened to him. Was it the oppression of a nightmare, the raving of fever, or an actual apparition? Striving to calm, as far as possible, his mental tumult, and stay the wildly rushing blood, which beat with straining pulses in every vein, he went to the window and opened it. The cool breeze revived him. The moonlight lay on the roofs and the white walls of the houses, though small clouds passed frequently across the sky. All was still: from time to time there struck the ear the distant rumble of a carriage. He put his head out of the window, and gazed for some time. Already the signs of approaching dawn were spreading over the sky. At last he felt drowsy, shut to the window, stepped back, lay down in bed, and quickly fell, like one exhausted, into a deep sleep.

He awoke late, and with the disagreeable feeling of a man who has been half-suffocated with coal-gas: his head ached painfully. The room was dim: an unpleasant moisture pervaded the air, and penetrated the cracks of his windows. Dissatisfied and depressed as a wet cock, he seated himself on his dilapidated divan, not knowing what to do, what to set about, and at length remembered the whole of his dream. As he recalled it, the dream presented itself to his mind as so oppressively real that he even began to wonder whether it were a dream, whether there were not something more here, whether it were not really an apparition. Removing the sheet, he looked at the terrible portrait by the light of day. The eyes were really striking in their liveliness, but he found nothing particularly terrible about them, though an indescribably unpleasant feeling lingered in his mind. Nevertheless, he could not quite convince himself that it was a dream. It struck him that there must have been some terrible fragment of reality in the vision. It seemed as though there were something in the old man's very glance and expression which said that he had been with him that night: his hand still felt the weight which had so recently lain in it as if some one had but just snatched it from him. It seemed to him that, if he had only grasped the roll more firmly, it would have remained in his hand, even after his awakening.

"My God, if I only had a portion of that money!" he said, breathing heavily; and in his fancy, all the rolls of coin, with their fascinating inscription, "1000 ducats," began to pour out of the purse. The rolls opened, the gold glittered, and was wrapped up again; and he sat motionless, with his eyes fixed on the empty air, as if he were incapable of tearing himself from such a sight, like a child who sits before a plate of sweets, and beholds, with watering mouth, other people devouring them.

At last there came a knock on the door, which recalled him unpleasantly to himself. The landlord entered with the constable of the district, whose presence is even more disagreeable to poor people than is the presence of a beggar to the rich. The landlord of the little house in which Tchartkoff lived resembled the other individuals who own houses anywhere in the Vasilievsky Ostroff, on the St. Petersburg side, or in the distant regions of Kolomna--individuals whose character is as difficult to define as the colour of a threadbare surtout. In his youth he had been a captain and a braggart, a master in the art of flogging, skilful, foppish, and stupid; but in his old age he combined all these various qualities into a kind of dim indefiniteness. He was a widower, already on the retired list, no longer boasted, nor was dandified, nor quarrelled, but only cared to drink tea and talk all sorts of nonsense over it. He walked about his room, and arranged the ends of the tallow candles; called punctually at the end of each month upon his lodgers for money; went out into the street, with the key in his hand, to look at the roof of his house, and sometimes chased the porter out of his den, where he had hidden himself to sleep. In short, he was a man on the retired list, who, after the turmoils and wildness of his life, had only his old-fashioned habits left.

"Please to see for yourself, Varukh Kusmitch," said the landlord, turning to the officer, and throwing out his hands, "this man does not pay his rent, he does not pay."

"How can I when I have no money? Wait, and I will pay."

"I can't wait, my good fellow," said the landlord angrily, making a gesture with the key which he held in his hand. "Lieutenant-Colonel Potogonkin has lived with me seven years, seven years already; Anna

Petrovna Buchmisteroff rents the coach-house and stable, with the exception of two stalls, and has three household servants: that is the kind of lodgers I have. I say to you frankly, that this is not an establishment where people do not pay their rent. Pay your money at once, please, or else clear out."

"Yes, if you rented the rooms, please to pay," said the constable, with a slight shake of the head, as he laid his finger on one of the buttons of his uniform.

"Well, what am I to pay with? that's the question. I haven't a groschen just at present."

"In that case, satisfy the claims of Ivan Ivanovitch with the fruits of your profession," said the officer: "perhaps he will consent to take pictures."

"No, thank you, my good fellow, no pictures. Pictures of holy subjects, such as one could hang upon the walls, would be well enough; or some general with a star, or Prince Kutusoff's portrait. But this fellow has painted that muzhik, that muzhik in his blouse, his servant who grinds his colours! The idea of painting his portrait, the hog! I'll thrash him well: he took all the nails out of my bolts, the scoundrel! Just see what subjects! Here he has drawn his room. It would have been well enough had he taken a clean, well-furnished room; but he has gone and drawn this one, with all the dirt and rubbish he has collected. Just see how he has defaced my room! Look for yourself. Yes, and my lodgers have been with me seven years, the lieutenant-colonel, Anna Petrovna Buchmisteroff. No, I tell you, there is no worse lodger than a painter: he lives like a pig--God have mercy!"

The poor artist had to listen patiently to all this. Meanwhile the officer had occupied himself with examining the pictures and studies, and showed that his mind was more advanced than the landlord's, and that he was not insensible to artistic impressions.

"Heh!" said he, tapping one canvas, on which was depicted a naked woman, "this subject is--lively. But why so much black under her nose? did she take snuff?"

"Shadow," answered Tchartkoff gruffly, without looking at him.

"But it might have been put in some other place: it is too conspicuous under the nose," observed the officer. "And whose likeness is this?" he continued, approaching the old man's portrait. "It is too terrible. Was he really so dreadful? Ah! why, he actually looks at one! What a thunder-cloud! From whom did you paint it?"

"Ah! it is from a--" said Tchartkoff, but did not finish his sentence: he heard a crack. It seems that the officer had pressed too hard on the frame of the portrait, thanks to the weight of his constable's hands. The small boards at the side caved in, one fell on the floor, and with it fell, with a heavy crash, a roll of blue paper. The inscription caught Tchartkoff's eye--"1000 ducats." Like a madman, he sprang to pick it up, grasped the roll, and gripped it convulsively in his hand, which sank with the weight.

"Wasn't there a sound of money?" inquired the officer, hearing the noise of something falling on the floor, and not catching sight of it, owing to the rapidity with which Tchartkoff had hastened to pick it up.

"What business is it of yours what is in my room?"

"It's my business because you ought to pay your rent to the landlord at once; because you have money, and won't pay, that's why it's my business."

"Well, I will pay him to-day."

"Well, and why wouldn't you pay before, instead of giving trouble to your landlord, and bothering the police to boot?"

"Because I did not want to touch this money. I will pay him in full this evening, and leave the rooms to-morrow. I will not stay with such a landlord."

"Well, Ivan Ivanovitch, he will pay you," said the constable, turning to the landlord. "But in case you are not satisfied in every respect this evening, then you must excuse me, Mr. Painter." So saying, he put on his three-cornered hat, and went into the ante-room, followed by the

landlord hanging his head, and apparently engaged in meditation.

"Thank God, Satan has carried them off!" said Tchartkoff, as he heard the outer door of the ante-room close. He looked out into the ante-room, sent Nikita off on some errand, in order to be quite alone, fastened the door behind him, and, returning to his room, began with wildly beating heart to undo the roll.

In it were ducats, all new, and bright as fire. Almost beside himself, he sat down beside the pile of gold, still asking himself, "Is not this all a dream?" There were just a thousand in the roll, the exterior of which was precisely like what he had seen in his dream. He turned them over, and looked at them for some minutes. His imagination recalled up all the tales he had heard of hidden hoards, cabinets with secret drawers, left by ancestors for their spendthrift descendants, with firm belief in the extravagance of their life. He pondered this: "Did not some grandfather, in the present instance, leave a gift for his grandchild, shut up in the frame of a family portrait?" Filled with romantic fancies, he began to think whether this had not some secret connection with his fate? whether the existence of the portrait was not bound up with his own, and whether his acquisition of it was not due to a kind of predestination?

He began to examine the frame with curiosity. On one side a cavity was hollowed out, but concealed so skilfully and neatly by a little board, that, if the massive hand of the constable had not effected a breach, the ducats might have remained hidden to the end of time. On examining the portrait, he marvelled again at the exquisite workmanship, the extraordinary treatment of the eyes. They no longer appeared terrible to him; but, nevertheless, each time he looked at them a disagreeable feeling involuntarily lingered in his mind.

"No," he said to himself, "no matter whose grandfather you were, I'll put a glass over you, and get you a gilt frame." Then he laid his hand on the golden pile before him, and his heart beat faster at the touch. "What shall I do with them?" he said, fixing his eyes on them. "Now I am independent for at least three years: I can shut myself up in my room and work. I have money for colours now; for food and lodging--no one will annoy and disturb me now. I will buy myself a first-class lay figure, I will order a plaster torso, and some model feet, I will have

a Venus. I will buy engravings of the best pictures. And if I work three years to satisfy myself, without haste or with the idea of selling, I shall surpass all, and may become a distinguished artist."

Thus he spoke in solitude, with his good judgment prompting him; but louder and more distinct sounded another voice within him. As he glanced once more at the gold, it was not thus that his twenty-two years and fiery youth reasoned. Now everything was within his power on which he had hitherto gazed with envious eyes, had viewed from afar with longing. How his heart beat when he thought of it! To wear a fashionable coat, to feast after long abstinence, to hire handsome apartments, to go at once to the theatre, to the confectioner's, to... other places; and seizing his money, he was in the street in a moment.

First of all he went to the tailor, was clothed anew from head to foot, and began to look at himself like a child. He purchased perfumes and pomades; hired the first elegant suite of apartments with mirrors and plateglass windows which he came across in the Nevsky Prospect, without haggling about the price; bought, on the impulse of the moment, a costly eye-glass; bought, also on the impulse, a number of neckties of every description, many more than he needed; had his hair curled at the hairdresser's; rode through the city twice without any object whatever; ate an immense quantity of sweetmeats at the confectioner's; and went to the French Restaurant, of which he had heard rumours as indistinct as though they had concerned the Empire of China. There he dined, casting proud glances at the other visitors, and continually arranging his curls in the glass. There he drank a bottle of champagne, which had been known to him hitherto only by hearsay. The wine rather affected his head; and he emerged into the street, lively, pugnacious, and ready to raise the Devil, according to the Russian expression. He strutted along the pavement, levelling his eye-glass at everybody. On the bridge he caught sight of his former professor, and slipped past him neatly, as if he did not see him, so that the astounded professor stood stock-still on the bridge for a long time, with a face suggestive of a note of interrogation.

All his goods and chattels, everything he owned, easels, canvas, pictures, were transported that same evening to his elegant quarters. He arranged the best of them in conspicuous places, threw the worst into a corner, and promenaded up and down the handsome rooms, glancing

constantly in the mirrors. An unconquerable desire to take the bull by the horns, and show himself to the world at once, had arisen in his mind. He already heard the shouts, "Tchartkoff! Tchartkoff! Tchartkoff paints! What talent Tchartkoff has!" He paced the room in a state of rapture.

The next day he took ten ducats, and went to the editor of a popular journal asking his charitable assistance. He was joyfully received by the journalist, who called him on the spot, "Most respected sir," squeezed both his hands, and made minute inquiries as to his name, birthplace, residence. The next day there appeared in the journal, below a notice of some newly invented tallow candles, an article with the following heading:--

"TCHARTKOFF'S IMMENSE TALENT

"We hasten to delight the cultivated inhabitants of the capital with a discovery which we may call splendid in every respect. All are agreed that there are among us many very handsome faces, but hitherto there has been no means of committing them to canvas for transmission to posterity. This want has now been supplied: an artist has been found who unites in himself all desirable qualities. The beauty can now feel assured that she will be depicted with all the grace of her charms, airy, fascinating, butterfly-like, flitting among the flowers of spring. The stately father of a family can see himself surrounded by his family. Merchant, warrior, citizen, statesman--hasten one and all, wherever you may be. The artist's magnificent establishment (Nevsky Prospect, such and such a number) is hung with portraits from his brush, worthy of Van Dyck or Titian. We do not know which to admire most, their truth and likeness to the originals, or the wonderful brilliancy and freshness of the colouring. Hail to you, artist! you have drawn a lucky number in the lottery. Long live Andrei Petrovitch!" (The journalist evidently liked familiarity.) "Glorify yourself and us. We know how to prize you. Universal popularity, and with it wealth, will be your meed, though some of our brother journalists may rise against you."

The artist read this article with secret satisfaction; his face beamed. He was mentioned in print; it was a novelty to him: he read the lines over several times. The comparison with Van Dyck and Titian flattered him extremely. The praise, "Long live Andrei Petrovitch," also pleased

him greatly: to be spoken of by his Christian name and patronymic in print was an honour hitherto totally unknown to him. He began to pace the chamber briskly, now he sat down in an armchair, now he sprang up, and seated himself on the sofa, planning each moment how he would receive visitors, male and female; he went to his canvas and made a rapid sweep of the brush, endeavouring to impart a graceful movement to his hand.

The next day, the bell at his door rang. He hastened to open it. A lady entered, accompanied by a girl of eighteen, her daughter, and followed by a lackey in a furred livery-coat.

"You are the painter Tchartkoff?"

The artist bowed.

"A great deal is written about you: your portraits, it is said, are the height of perfection." So saying, the lady raised her glass to her eyes and glanced rapidly over the walls, upon which nothing was hanging. "But where are your portraits?"

"They have been taken away" replied the artist, somewhat confusedly: "I have but just moved into these apartments; so they are still on the road, they have not arrived."

"You have been in Italy?" asked the lady, levelling her glass at him, as she found nothing else to point it at.

"No, I have not been there; but I wish to go, and I have deferred it for a while. Here is an arm-chair, madame: you are fatigued?"

"Thank you: I have been sitting a long time in the carriage. Ah, at last I behold your work!" said the lady, running to the opposite wall, and bringing her glass to bear upon his studies, sketches, views and portraits which were standing there on the floor. "It is charming. Lise! Lise, come here. Rooms in the style of Teniers. Do you see? Disorder, disorder, a table with a bust upon it, a hand, a palette; dust, see how the dust is painted! It is charming. And here on this canvas is a woman washing her face. What a pretty face! Ah! a little muzhik! So you do not devote yourself exclusively to portraits?"

"Oh! that is mere rubbish. I was trying experiments, studies."

"Tell me your opinion of the portrait painters of the present day. Is it not true that there are none now like Titian? There is not that strength of colour, that--that--What a pity that I cannot express myself in Russian." The lady was fond of paintings, and had gone through all the galleries in Italy with her eye-glass. "But Monsieur Nohl--ah, how well he paints! what remarkable work! I think his faces have been more expression than Titian's. You do not know Monsieur Nohl?"

"Who is Nohl?" inquired the artist.

"Monsieur Nohl. Ah, what talent! He painted her portrait when she was only twelve years old. You must certainly come to see us. Lise, you shall show him your album. You know, we came expressly that you might begin her portrait immediately."

"What? I am ready this very moment." And in a trice he pulled forward an easel with a canvas already prepared, grasped his palette, and fixed his eyes on the daughter's pretty little face. If he had been acquainted with human nature, he might have read in it the dawning of a childish passion for balls, the dawning of sorrow and misery at the length of time before dinner and after dinner, the heavy traces of uninterested application to various arts, insisted upon by her mother for the elevation of her mind. But the artist saw only the tender little face, a seductive subject for his brush, the body almost as transparent as porcelain, the delicate white neck, and the aristocratically slender form. And he prepared beforehand to triumph, to display the delicacy of his brush, which had hitherto had to deal only with the harsh features of coarse models, and severe antiques and copies of classic masters. He already saw in fancy how this delicate little face would turn out.

"Do you know," said the lady with a positively touching expression of countenance, "I should like her to be painted simply attired, and seated among green shadows, like meadows, with a flock or a grove in the distance, so that it could not be seen that she goes to balls or fashionable entertainments. Our balls, I must confess, murder the intellect, deaden all remnants of feeling. Simplicity! would there were more simplicity!" Alas, it was stamped on the faces of mother and

daughter that they had so over danced themselves at balls that they had become almost wax figures.

Tchartkoff set to work, posed his model, reflected a bit, fixed upon the idea, waved his brush in the air, settling the points mentally, and then began and finished the sketching in within an hour. Satisfied with it, he began to paint. The task fascinated him; he forgot everything, forgot the very existence of the aristocratic ladies, began even to display some artistic tricks, uttering various odd sounds and humming to himself now and then as artists do when immersed heart and soul in their work. Without the slightest ceremony, he made the sitter lift her head, which finally began to express utter weariness.

"Enough for the first time," said the lady.

"A little more," said the artist, forgetting himself.

"No, it is time to stop. Lise, three o'clock!" said the lady, taking out a tiny watch which hung by a gold chain from her girdle. "How late it is!"

"Only a minute," said Tchartkoff innocently, with the pleading voice of a child.

But the lady appeared to be not at all inclined to yield to his artistic demands on this occasion; she promised, however, to sit longer the next time.

"It is vexatious, all the same," thought Tchartkoff to himself: "I had just got my hand in;" and he remembered no one had interrupted him or stopped him when he was at work in his studio on Vasilievsky Ostroff. Nikita sat motionless in one place. You might even paint him as long as you pleased; he even went to sleep in the attitude prescribed him. Feeling dissatisfied, he laid his brush and palette on a chair, and paused in irritation before the picture.

The woman of the world's compliments awoke him from his reverie. He flew to the door to show them out: on the stairs he received an invitation to dine with them the following week, and returned with a cheerful face to his apartments. The aristocratic lady had completely charmed him. Up to

that time he had looked upon such beings as unapproachable, born solely to ride in magnificent carriages, with liveried footmen and stylish coachmen, and to cast indifferent glances on the poor man travelling on foot in a cheap cloak. And now, all of a sudden, one of these very beings had entered his room; he was painting her portrait, was invited to dinner at an aristocratic house. An unusual feeling of pleasure took possession of him: he was completely intoxicated, and rewarded himself with a splendid dinner, an evening at the theatre, and a drive through the city in a carriage, without any necessity whatever.

But meanwhile his ordinary work did not fall in with his mood at all. He did nothing but wait for the moment when the bell should ring. At last the aristocratic lady arrived with her pale daughter. He seated them, drew forward the canvas with skill, and some efforts of fashionable airs, and began to paint. The sunny day and bright light aided him not a little: he saw in his dainty sitter much which, caught and committed to canvas, would give great value to the portrait. He perceived that he might accomplish something good if he could reproduce, with accuracy, all that nature then offered to his eyes. His heart began to beat faster as he felt that he was expressing something which others had not even seen as yet. His work engrossed him completely: he was wholly taken up with it, and again forgot the aristocratic origin of the sitter. With heaving breast he saw the delicate features and the almost transparent body of the fair maiden grow beneath his hand. He had caught every shade, the slight sallowness, the almost imperceptible blue tinge under the eyes--and was already preparing to put in the tiny mole on the brow, when he suddenly heard the mother's voice behind him.

"Ah! why do you paint that? it is not necessary: and you have made it here, in several places, rather yellow; and here, quite so, like dark spots."

The artist undertook to explain that the spots and yellow tinge would turn out well, that they brought out the delicate and pleasing tones of the face. He was informed that they did not bring out tones, and would not turn out well at all. It was explained to him that just to-day Lise did not feel quite well; that she never was sallow, and that her face was distinguished for its fresh colouring.

Sadly he began to erase what his brush had put upon the canvas. Many

a nearly imperceptible feature disappeared, and with it vanished too a portion of the resemblance. He began indifferently to impart to the picture that commonplace colouring which can be painted mechanically, and which lends to a face, even when taken from nature, the sort of cold ideality observable on school programmes. But the lady was satisfied when the objectionable tone was quite banished. She merely expressed surprise that the work lasted so long, and added that she had heard that he finished a portrait completely in two sittings. The artist could not think of any answer to this. The ladies rose, and prepared to depart. He laid aside his brush, escorted them to the door, and then stood disconsolate for a long while in one spot before the portrait.

He gazed stupidly at it; and meanwhile there floated before his mind's eye those delicate features, those shades, and airy tints which he had copied, and which his brush had annihilated. Engrossed with them, he put the portrait on one side and hunted up a head of Psyche which he had some time before thrown on canvas in a sketchy manner. It was a pretty little face, well painted, but entirely ideal, and having cold, regular features not lit up by life. For lack of occupation, he now began to tone it up, imparting to it all he had taken note of in his aristocratic sitter. Those features, shadows, tints, which he had noted, made their appearance here in the purified form in which they appear when the painter, after closely observing nature, subordinates himself to her, and produces a creation equal to her own.

Psyche began to live: and the scarcely dawning thought began, little by little, to clothe itself in a visible form. The type of face of the fashionable young lady was unconsciously transferred to Psyche, yet nevertheless she had an expression of her own which gave the picture claims to be considered in truth an original creation. Tchartkoff gave himself up entirely to his work. For several days he was engrossed by it alone, and the ladies surprised him at it on their arrival. He had not time to remove the picture from the easel. Both ladies uttered a cry of amazement, and clasped their hands.

"Lise, Lise! Ah, how like! Superb, superb! What a happy thought, too, to drape her in a Greek costume! Ah, what a surprise!"

The artist could not see his way to disabuse the ladies of their error. Shamefacedly, with drooping head, he murmured, "This is Psyche."

"In the character of Psyche? Charming!" said the mother, smiling, upon which the daughter smiled too. "Confess, Lise, it pleases you to be painted in the character of Psyche better than any other way? What a sweet idea! But what treatment! It is Correggio himself. I must say that, although I had read and heard about you, I did not know you had so much talent. You positively must paint me too." Evidently the lady wanted to be portrayed as some kind of Psyche too.

"What am I to do with them?" thought the artist. "If they will have it so, why, let Psyche pass for what they choose:" and added aloud, "Pray sit a little: I will touch it up here and there."

"Ah! I am afraid you will... it is such a capital likeness now!"

But the artist understood that the difficulty was with respect to the sallowness, and so he reassured them by saying that he only wished to give more brilliancy and expression to the eyes. In truth, he was ashamed, and wanted to impart a little more likeness to the original, lest any one should accuse him of actual barefaced flattery. And the features of the pale young girl at length appeared more closely in Psyche's countenance.

"Enough," said the mother, beginning to fear that the likeness might become too decided. The artist was remunerated in every way, with smiles, money, compliments, cordial pressures of the hand, invitations to dinner: in short, he received a thousand flattering rewards.

The portrait created a furore in the city. The lady exhibited it to her friends, and all admired the skill with which the artist had preserved the likeness, and at the same time conferred more beauty on the original. The last remark, of course, was prompted by a slight tinge of envy. The artist was suddenly overwhelmed with work. It seemed as if the whole city wanted to be painted by him. The door-bell rang incessantly. From one point of view, this might be considered advantageous, as presenting to him endless practice in variety and number of faces. But, unfortunately, they were all people who were hard to get along with, either busy, hurried people, or else belonging to the fashionable world, and consequently more occupied than any one else, and therefore impatient to the last degree. In all quarters, the demand was merely

that the likeness should be good and quickly executed. The artist perceived that it was a simple impossibility to finish his work; that it was necessary to exchange power of treatment for lightness and rapidity, to catch only the general expression, and not waste labour on delicate details.

Moreover, nearly all of his sitters made stipulations on various points. The ladies required that mind and character should be represented in their portraits; that all angles should be rounded, all unevenness smoothed away, and even removed entirely if possible; in short, that their faces should be such as to cause every one to stare at them with admiration, if not fall in love with them outright. When they sat to him, they sometimes assumed expressions which greatly amazed the artist; one tried to express melancholy; another, meditation; a third wanted to make her mouth appear small on any terms, and puckered it up to such an extent that it finally looked like a spot about as big as a pinhead. And in spite of all this, they demanded of him good likenesses and unconstrained naturalness. The men were no better: one insisted on being painted with an energetic, muscular turn to his head; another, with upturned, inspired eyes; a lieutenant of the guard demanded that Mars should be visible in his eyes; an official in the civil service drew himself up to his full height in order to have his uprightness expressed in his face, and that his hand might rest on a book bearing the words in plain characters, "He always stood up for the right."

At first such demands threw the artist into a cold perspiration. Finally he acquired the knack of it, and never troubled himself at all about it. He understood at a word how each wanted himself portrayed. If a man wanted Mars in his face, he put in Mars: he gave a Byronic turn and attitude to those who aimed at Byron. If the ladies wanted to be Corinne, Undine, or Aspasia, he agreed with great readiness, and threw in a sufficient measure of good looks from his own imagination, which does no harm, and for the sake of which an artist is even forgiven a lack of resemblance. He soon began to wonder himself at the rapidity and dash of his brush. And of course those who sat to him were in ecstasies, and proclaimed him a genius.

Tchartkoff became a fashionable artist in every sense of the word. He began to dine out, to escort ladies to picture galleries, to dress foppishly, and to assert audibly that an artist should belong to

society, that he must uphold his profession, that artists mostly dress like showmakers, do not know how to behave themselves, do not maintain the highest tone, and are lacking in all polish. At home, in his studio, he carried cleanliness and spotlessness to the last extreme, set up two superb footmen, took fashionable pupils, dressed several times a day, curled his hair, practised various manners of receiving his callers, and busied himself in adorning his person in every conceivable way, in order to produce a pleasing impression on the ladies. In short, it would soon have been impossible for any one to have recognised in him the modest artist who had formerly toiled unknown in his miserable quarters in the Vasilievsky Ostroff.

He now expressed himself decidedly concerning artists and art; declared that too much credit had been given to the old masters; that even Raphael did not always paint well, and that fame attached to many of his works simply by force of tradition: that Michael Angelo was a braggart because he could boast only a knowledge of anatomy; that there was no grace about him, and that real brilliancy and power of treatment and colouring were to be looked for in the present century. And there, naturally, the question touched him personally. "I do not understand," said he, "how others toil and work with difficulty: a man who labours for months over a picture is a dauber, and no artist in my opinion; I don't believe he has any talent: genius works boldly, rapidly. Here is this portrait which I painted in two days, this head in one day, this in a few hours, this in little more than an hour. No, I confess I do not recognise as art that which adds line to line; that is a handicraft, not art." In this manner did he lecture his visitors; and the visitors admired the strength and boldness of his works, uttered exclamations on hearing how fast they had been produced, and said to each other, "This is talent, real talent! see how he speaks, how his eyes gleam! There is something really extraordinary in his face!"

It flattered the artist to hear such reports about himself. When printed praise appeared in the papers, he rejoiced like a child, although this praise was purchased with his money. He carried the printed slips about with him everywhere, and showed them to friends and acquaintances as if by accident. His fame increased, his works and orders multiplied. Already the same portraits over and over again wearied him, by the same attitudes and turns, which he had learned by heart. He painted them now without any great interest in his work, brushing in some sort of a head,

and giving them to his pupil's to finish. At first he had sought to devise a new attitude each time. Now this had grown wearisome to him. His brain was tired with planning and thinking. It was out of his power; his fashionable life bore him far away from labour and thought. His work grew cold and colourless; and he betook himself with indifference to the reproduction of monotonous, well-worn forms. The eternally spick-and-span uniforms, and the so-to-speak buttoned-up faces of the government officials, soldiers, and statesmen, did not offer a wide field for his brush: it forgot how to render superb draperies and powerful emotion and passion. Of grouping, dramatic effect and its lofty connections, there was nothing. In face of him was only a uniform, a corsage, a dress-coat, and before which the artist feels cold and all imagination vanishes. Even his own peculiar merits were no longer visible in his works, yet they continued to enjoy renown; although genuine connoisseurs and artists merely shrugged their shoulders when they saw his latest productions. But some who had known Tchartkoff in his earlier days could not understand how the talent of which he had given such clear indications in the outset could so have vanished; and strove in vain to divine by what means genius could be extinguished in a man just when he had attained to the full development of his powers.

But the intoxicated artist did not hear these criticisms. He began to attain to the age of dignity, both in mind and years: to grow stout, and increase visibly in flesh. He often read in the papers such phrases as, "Our most respected Andrei Petrovitch; our worthy Andrei Petrovitch." He began to receive offers of distinguished posts in the service, invitations to examinations and committees. He began, as is usually the case in maturer years, to advocate Raphael and the old masters, not because he had become thoroughly convinced of their transcendent merits, but in order to snub the younger artists. His life was already approaching the period when everything which suggests impulse contracts within a man; when a powerful chord appeals more feebly to the spirit; when the touch of beauty no longer converts virgin strength into fire and flame, but when all the burnt-out sentiments become more vulnerable to the sound of gold, hearken more attentively to its seductive music, and little by little permit themselves to be completely lulled to sleep by it. Fame can give no pleasure to him who has stolen it, not won it; so all his feelings and impulses turned towards wealth. Gold was his passion, his ideal, his fear, his delight, his aim. The bundles of bank-notes increased in his coffers; and, like all to whose lot falls

this fearful gift, he began to grow inaccessible to every sentiment except the love of gold. But something occurred which gave him a powerful shock, and disturbed the whole tenor of his life.

One day he found upon his table a note, in which the Academy of Painting begged him, as a worthy member of its body, to come and give his opinion upon a new work which had been sent from Italy by a Russian artist who was perfecting himself there. The painter was one of his former comrades, who had been possessed with a passion for art from his earliest years, had given himself up to it with his whole soul, estranged himself from his friends and relatives, and had hastened to that wonderful Rome, at whose very name the artist's heart beats wildly and hotly. There he buried himself in his work from which he permitted nothing to entice him. He visited the galleries unweariedly, he stood for hours at a time before the works of the great masters, seizing and studying their marvellous methods. He never finished anything without revising his impressions several times before these great teachers, and reading in their works silent but eloquent counsels. He gave each impartially his due, appropriating from all only that which was most beautiful, and finally became the pupil of the divine Raphael alone, as a great poet, after reading many works, at last made Homer's "Iliad" his only breviary, having discovered that it contains all one wants, and that there is nothing which is not expressed in it in perfection. And so he brought away from his school the grand conception of creation, the mighty beauty of thought, the high charm of that heavenly brush.

When Tchartkoff entered the room, he found a crowd of visitors already collected before the picture. The most profound silence, such as rarely settles upon a throng of critics, reigned over all. He hastened to assume the significant expression of a connoisseur, and approached the picture; but, O God! what did he behold!

Pure, faultless, beautiful as a bride, stood the picture before him. The critics regarded this new hitherto unknown work with a feeling of involuntary wonder. All seemed united in it: the art of Raphael, reflected in the lofty grace of the grouping; the art of Correggio, breathing from the finished perfection of the workmanship. But more striking than all else was the evident creative power in the artist's mind. The very minutest object in the picture revealed it; he had caught that melting roundness of outline which is visible in nature only to

the artist creator, and which comes out as angles with a copyist. It was plainly visible how the artist, having imbibed it all from the external world, had first stored it in his mind, and then drawn it thence, as from a spiritual source, into one harmonious, triumphant song. And it was evident, even to the uninitiated, how vast a gulf there was fixed between creation and a mere copy from nature. Involuntary tears stood ready to fall in the eyes of those who surrounded the picture. It seemed as though all joined in a silent hymn to the divine work.

Motionless, with open mouth, Tchartkoff stood before the picture. At length, when by degrees the visitors and critics began to murmur and comment upon the merits of the work, and turning to him, begged him to express an opinion, he came to himself once more. He tried to assume an indifferent, everyday expression; strove to utter some such commonplace remark as; "Yes, to tell the truth, it is impossible to deny the artist's talent; there is something in it;" but the speech died upon his lips, tears and sobs burst forth uncontrollably, and he rushed from the room like one beside himself.

In a moment he stood in his magnificent studio. All his being, all his life, had been aroused in one instant, as if youth had returned to him, as if the dying sparks of his talent had blazed forth afresh. The bandage suddenly fell from his eyes. Heavens! to think of having mercilessly wasted the best years of his youth, of having extinguished, trodden out perhaps, that spark of fire which, cherished in his breast, might perhaps have been developed into magnificence and beauty, and have extorted too, its meed of tears and admiration! It seemed as though those impulses which he had known in other days re-awoke suddenly in his soul.

He seized a brush and approached his canvas. One thought possessed him wholly, one desire consumed him; he strove to depict a fallen angel. This idea was most in harmony with his frame of mind. The perspiration started out upon his face with his efforts; but, alas! his figures, attitudes, groups, thoughts, arranged themselves stiffly, disconnectedly. His hand and his imagination had been too long confined to one groove; and the fruitless effort to escape from the bonds and fetters which he had imposed upon himself, showed itself in irregularities and errors. He had despised the long, wearisome ladder to knowledge, and the first fundamental law of the future great man, hard

work. He gave vent to his vexation. He ordered all his later productions to be taken out of his studio, all the fashionable, lifeless pictures, all the portraits of hussars, ladies, and councillors of state.

He shut himself up alone in his room, would order no food, and devoted himself entirely to his work. He sat toiling like a scholar. But how pitifully wretched was all which proceeded from his hand! He was stopped at every step by his ignorance of the very first principles: simple ignorance of the mechanical part of his art chilled all inspiration and formed an impassable barrier to his imagination. His brush returned involuntarily to hackneyed forms: hands folded themselves in a set attitude; heads dared not make any unusual turn; the very garments turned out commonplace, and would not drape themselves to any unaccustomed posture of the body. And he felt and saw this all himself.

"But had I really any talent?" he said at length: "did not I deceive myself?" Uttering these words, he turned to the early works which he had painted so purely, so unselfishly, in former days, in his wretched cabin yonder in lonely Vasilievsky Ostroff. He began attentively to examine them all; and all the misery of his former life came back to him. "Yes," he cried despairingly, "I had talent: the signs and traces of it are everywhere visible--"

He paused suddenly, and shivered all over. His eyes encountered other eyes fixed immovably upon him. It was that remarkable portrait which he had bought in the Shtchukinui Dvor. All this time it had been covered up, concealed by other pictures, and had utterly gone out of his mind. Now, as if by design, when all the fashionable portraits and paintings had been removed from the studio, it looked forth, together with the productions of his early youth. As he recalled all the strange events connected with it; as he remembered that this singular portrait had been, in a manner, the cause of his errors; that the hoard of money which he had obtained in such peculiar fashion had given birth in his mind to all the wild caprices which had destroyed his talent--madness was on the point of taking possession of him. At once he ordered the hateful portrait to be removed.

But his mental excitement was not thereby diminished. His whole being was shaken to its foundation; and he suffered that fearful torture which is sometimes exhibited when a feeble talent strives to display itself

on a scale too great for it and cannot do so. A horrible envy took possession of him--an envy which bordered on madness. The gall flew to his heart when he beheld a work which bore the stamp of talent. He gnashed his teeth, and devoured it with the glare of a basilisk. He conceived the most devilish plan which ever entered into the mind of man, and he hastened with the strength of madness to carry it into execution. He began to purchase the best that art produced of every kind. Having bought a picture at a great price, he transported it to his room, flung himself upon it with the ferocity of a tiger, cut it, tore it, chopped it into bits, and stamped upon it with a grin of delight.

The vast wealth he had amassed enabled him to gratify this devilish desire. He opened his bags of gold and unlocked his coffers. No monster of ignorance ever destroyed so many superb productions of art as did this raging avenger. At any auction where he made his appearance, every one despaired at once of obtaining any work of art. It seemed as if an angry heaven had sent this fearful scourge into the world expressly to destroy all harmony. Scorn of the world was expressed in his countenance. His tongue uttered nothing save biting and censorious words. He swooped down like a harpy into the street: and his acquaintances, catching sight of him in the distance, sought to turn aside and avoid a meeting with him, saying that it poisoned all the rest of the day.

Fortunately for the world and art, such a life could not last long: his passions were too overpowering for his feeble strength. Attacks of madness began to recur more frequently, and ended at last in the most frightful illness. A violent fever, combined with galloping consumption, seized upon him with such violence, that in three days there remained only a shadow of his former self. To this was added indications of hopeless insanity. Sometimes several men were unable to hold him. The long-forgotten, living eyes of the portrait began to torment him, and then his madness became dreadful. All the people who surrounded his bed seemed to him horrible portraits. The portrait doubled and quadrupled itself; all the walls seemed hung with portraits, which fastened their living eyes upon him; portraits glared at him from the ceiling, from the floor; the room widened and lengthened endlessly, in order to make room for more of the motionless eyes. The doctor who had undertaken to attend him, having learned something of his strange history, strove with all his might to fathom the secret connection between the visions of

his fancy and the occurrences of his life, but without the slightest success. The sick man understood nothing, felt nothing, save his own tortures, and gave utterance only to frightful yells and unintelligible gibberish. At last his life ended in a final attack of unutterable suffering. Nothing could be found of all his great wealth; but when they beheld the mutilated fragments of grand works of art, the value of which exceeded a million, they understood the terrible use which had been made of it.

PART II

A THRONG of carriages and other vehicles stood at the entrance of a house in which an auction was going on of the effects of one of those wealthy art-lovers who have innocently passed for Maecenases, and in a simple-minded fashion expended, to that end, the millions amassed by their thrifty fathers, and frequently even by their own early labours. The long saloon was filled with the most motley throng of visitors, collected like birds of prey swooping down upon an unburied corpse. There was a whole squadron of Russian shop-keepers from the Gostinnui Dvor, and from the old-clothes mart, in blue coats of foreign make. Their faces and expressions were a little more natural here, and did not display that fictitious desire to be subservient which is so marked in the Russian shop-keeper when he stands before a customer in his shop. Here they stood upon no ceremony, although the saloons were full of those very aristocrats before whom, in any other place, they would have been ready to sweep, with reverence, the dust brought in by their feet. They were quite at their ease, handling pictures and books without ceremony, when desirous of ascertaining the value of the goods, and boldly upsetting bargains mentally secured in advance by noble connoisseurs. There were many of those infallible attendants of auctions who make it a point to go to one every day as regularly as to take their breakfast; aristocratic connoisseurs who look upon it as their duty not to miss any opportunity of adding to their collections, and who have no other occupation between twelve o'clock and one; and noble gentlemen, with garments very threadbare, who make their daily appearance without any selfish object in view, but merely to see how it all goes off.

A quantity of pictures were lying about in disorder: with them were

mingled furniture, and books with the cipher of the former owner, who never was moved by any laudable desire to glance into them. Chinese vases, marble slabs for tables, old and new furniture with curving lines, with griffins, sphinxes, and lions' paws, gilded and ungilded, chandeliers, sconces, all were heaped together in a perfect chaos of art.

The auction appeared to be at its height.

The surging throng was competing for a portrait which could not but arrest the attention of all who possessed any knowledge of art. The skilled hand of an artist was plainly visible in it. The portrait, which had apparently been several times restored and renovated, represented the dark features of an Asiatic in flowing garments, and with a strange and remarkable expression of countenance; but what struck the buyers more than anything else was the peculiar liveliness of the eyes. The more they were looked at, the more did they seem to penetrate into the gazer's heart. This peculiarity, this strange illusion achieved by the artist, attracted the attention of nearly all. Many who had been bidding gradually withdrew, for the price offered had risen to an incredible sum. There remained only two well-known aristocrats, amateurs of painting, who were unwilling to forego such an acquisition. They grew warm, and would probably have run the bidding up to an impossible sum, had not one of the onlookers suddenly exclaimed, "Permit me to interrupt your competition for a while: I, perhaps, more than any other, have a right to this portrait."

These words at once drew the attention of all to him. He was a tall man of thirty-five, with long black curls. His pleasant face, full of a certain bright nonchalance, indicated a mind free from all wearisome, worldly excitement; his garments had no pretence to fashion: all about him indicated the artist. He was, in fact, B. the painter, a man personally well known to many of those present.

"However strange my words may seem to you," he continued, perceiving that the general attention was directed to him, "if you will listen to a short story, you may possibly see that I was right in uttering them. Everything assures me that this is the portrait which I am looking for."

A natural curiosity illuminated the faces of nearly all present; and

even the auctioneer paused as he was opening his mouth, and with hammer uplifted in the air, prepared to listen. At the beginning of the story, many glanced involuntarily towards the portrait; but later on, all bent their attention solely on the narrator, as his tale grew gradually more absorbing.

"You know that portion of the city which is called Kolomna," he began. "There everything is unlike anything else in St. Petersburg. Retired officials remove thither to live; widows; people not very well off, who have acquaintances in the senate, and therefore condemn themselves to this for nearly the whole of their lives; and, in short, that whole list of people who can be described by the words ash-coloured--people whose garments, faces, hair, eyes, have a sort of ashy surface, like a day when there is in the sky neither cloud nor sun. Among them may be retired actors, retired titular councillors, retired sons of Mars, with ruined eyes and swollen lips.

"Life in Kolomna is terribly dull: rarely does a carriage appear, except, perhaps, one containing an actor, which disturbs the universal stillness by its rumble, noise, and jingling. You can get lodgings for five rubles a month, coffee in the morning included. Widows with pensions are the most aristocratic families there; they conduct themselves well, sweep their rooms often, chatter with their friends about the dearness of beef and cabbage, and frequently have a young daughter, a taciturn, quiet, sometimes pretty creature; an ugly dog, and wall-clocks which strike in a melancholy fashion. Then come the actors whose salaries do not permit them to desert Kolomna, an independent folk, living, like all artists, for pleasure. They sit in their dressing-gowns, cleaning their pistols, gluing together all sorts of things out of cardboard, playing draughts and cards with any friend who chances to drop in, and so pass away the morning, doing pretty nearly the same in the evening, with the addition of punch now and then. After these great people and aristocracy of Kolomna, come the rank and file. It is as difficult to put a name to them as to remember the multitude of insects which breed in stale vinegar. There are old women who get drunk, who make a living by incomprehensible means, like ants, dragging old clothes and rags from the Kalinkin Bridge to the old clothes-mart, in order to sell them for fifteen kopeks--in short, the very dregs of mankind, whose conditions no beneficent, political economist has devised any means of ameliorating.

"I have mentioned them in order to point out how often such people find themselves under the necessity of seeking immediate temporary assistance and having recourse to borrowing. Hence there settles among them a peculiar race of money-lenders who lend small sums on security at an enormous percentage. Among these usurers was a certain... but I must not omit to mention that the occurrence which I have undertaken to relate occurred the last century, in the reign of our late Empress Catherine the Second. So, among the usurers, at that epoch, was a certain person--an extraordinary being in every respect, who had settled in that quarter of the city long before. He went about in flowing Asiatic garb; his dark complexion indicated a Southern origin, but to what particular nation he belonged, India, Greece, or Persia, no one could say with certainty. Of tall, almost colossal stature, with dark, thin, ardent face, heavy overhanging brows, and an indescribably strange colour in his large eyes of unwonted fire, he differed sharply and strongly from all the ash-coloured denizens of the capital.

"His very dwelling was unlike the other little wooden houses. It was of stone, in the style of those formerly much affected by Genoese merchants, with irregular windows of various sizes, secured with iron shutters and bars. This usurer differed from other usurers also in that he could furnish any required sum, from that desired by the poor old beggar-woman to that demanded by the extravagant grandee of the court. The most gorgeous equipages often halted in front of his house, and from their windows sometimes peeped forth the head of an elegant high-born lady. Rumour, as usual, reported that his iron coffers were full of untold gold, treasures, diamonds, and all sorts of pledges, but that, nevertheless, he was not the slave of that avarice which is characteristic of other usurers. He lent money willingly, and on very favourable terms of payment apparently, but, by some curious method of reckoning, made them mount to an incredible percentage. So said rumour, at any rate. But what was strangest of all was the peculiar fate of those who received money from him: they all ended their lives in some unhappy way. Whether this was simply the popular superstition, or the result of reports circulated with an object, is not known. But several instances which happened within a brief space of time before the eyes of every one were vivid and striking.

"Among the aristocracy of that day, one who speedily drew attention

to himself was a young man of one of the best families who had made a figure in his early years in court circles, a warm admirer of everything true and noble, zealous in his love for art, and giving promise of becoming a Maecenas. He was soon deservedly distinguished by the Empress, who conferred upon him an important post, fully proportioned to his deserts--a post in which he could accomplish much for science and the general welfare. The youthful dignitary surrounded himself with artists, poets, and learned men. He wished to give work to all, to encourage all. He undertook, at his own expense, a number of useful publications; gave numerous orders to artists; offered prizes for the encouragement of different arts; spent a great deal of money, and finally ruined himself. But, full of noble impulses, he did not wish to relinquish his work, sought to raise a loan, and finally betook himself to the well-known usurer. Having borrowed a considerable sum from him, the man in a short time changed completely. He became a persecutor and oppressor of budding talent and intellect. He saw the bad side in everything produced, and every word he uttered was false.

"Then, unfortunately, came the French Revolution. This furnished him with an excuse for every kind of suspicion. He began to discover a revolutionary tendency in everything; to concoct terrible and unjust accusations, which made scores of people unhappy. Of course, such conduct could not fail in time to reach the throne. The kind-hearted Empress was shocked; and, full of the noble spirit which adorns crowned heads, she uttered words still engraven on many hearts. The Empress remarked that not under a monarchical government were high and noble impulses persecuted; not there were the creations of intellect, poetry, and art contemned and oppressed. On the other hand, monarchs alone were their protectors. Shakespeare and Moliere flourished under their magnanimous protection, while Dante could not find a corner in his republican birthplace. She said that true geniuses arise at the epoch of brilliancy and power in emperors and empires, but not in the time of monstrous political apparitions and republican terrorism, which, up to that time, had never given to the world a single poet; that poet-artists should be marked out for favour, since peace and divine quiet alone compose their minds, not excitement and tumult; that learned men, poets, and all producers of art are the pearls and diamonds in the imperial crown: by them is the epoch of the great ruler adorned, and from them it receives yet greater brilliancy.

"As the Empress uttered these words she was divinely beautiful for the moment, and I remember old men who could not speak of the occurrence without tears. All were interested in the affair. It must be remarked, to the honour of our national pride, that in the Russian's heart there always beats a fine feeling that he must adopt the part of the persecuted. The dignitary who had betrayed his trust was punished in an exemplary manner and degraded from his post. But he read a more dreadful punishment in the faces of his fellow-countrymen: universal scorn. It is impossible to describe what he suffered, and he died in a terrible attack of raving madness.

"Another striking example also occurred. Among the beautiful women in which our northern capital assuredly is not poor, one decidedly surpassed the rest. Her loveliness was a combination of our Northern charms with those of the South, a gem such as rarely makes its appearance on earth. My father said that he had never beheld anything like it in the whole course of his life. Everything seemed to be united in her, wealth, intellect, and wit. She had throngs of admirers, the most distinguished of them being Prince R., the most noble-minded of all young men, the finest in face, and an ideal of romance in his magnanimous and knightly sentiments. Prince R. was passionately in love, and was requited by a like ardent passion.

"But the match seemed unequal to the parents. The prince's family estates had not been in his possession for a long time, his family was out of favour, and the sad state of his affairs was well known to all. Of a sudden the prince quitted the capital, as if for the purpose of arranging his affairs, and after a short interval reappeared, surrounded with luxury and splendour. Brilliant balls and parties made him known at court. The lady's father began to relent, and the wedding took place. Whence this change in circumstances, this unheard-of-wealth, came, no one could fully explain; but it was whispered that he had entered into a compact with the mysterious usurer, and had borrowed money of him. However that may have been, the wedding was a source of interest to the whole city, and the bride and bridegroom were objects of general envy. Every one knew of their warm and faithful love, the long persecution they had had to endure from every quarter, the great personal worth of both. Ardent women at once sketched out the heavenly bliss which the young couple would enjoy. But it turned out very differently.

"In the course of a year a frightful change came over the husband. His character, up to that time so noble, became poisoned with jealous suspicions, irritability, and inexhaustible caprices. He became a tyrant to his wife, a thing which no one could have foreseen, and indulged in the most inhuman deeds, and even in blows. In a year's time no one would have recognised the woman who, such a little while before, had dazzled and drawn about her throngs of submissive adorers. Finally, no longer able to endure her lot, she proposed a divorce. Her husband flew into a rage at the very suggestion. In the first outburst of passion, he chased her about the room with a knife, and would doubtless have murdered her then and there, if they had not seized him and prevented him. In a fit of madness and despair he turned the knife against himself, and ended his life amid the most horrible sufferings.

"Besides these two instances which occurred before the eyes of all the world, stories circulated of many more among the lower classes, nearly all of which had tragic endings. Here an honest sober man became a drunkard; there a shopkeeper's clerk robbed his master; again, a driver who had conducted himself properly for a number of years cut his passenger's throat for a groschen. It was impossible that such occurrences, related, not without embellishments, should not inspire a sort of involuntary horror amongst the sedate inhabitants of Kolomna. No one entertained any doubt as to the presence of an evil power in the usurer. They said that he imposed conditions which made the hair rise on one's head, and which the miserable wretch never afterward dared reveal to any other being; that his money possessed a strange power of attraction; that it grew hot of itself, and that it bore strange marks. And it is worthy of remark, that all the colony of Kolomna, all these poor old women, small officials, petty artists, and insignificant people whom we have just recapitulated, agreed that it was better to endure anything, and to suffer the extreme of misery, rather than to have recourse to the terrible usurer. Old women were even found dying of hunger, who preferred to kill their bodies rather than lose their soul. Those who met him in the street experienced an involuntary sense of fear. Pedestrians took care to turn aside from his path, and gazed long after his tall, receding figure. In his face alone there was sufficient that was uncommon to cause any one to ascribe to him a supernatural nature. The strong features, so deeply chiselled; the glowing bronze of his complexion; the incredible thickness of his brows; the intolerable, terrible eyes--everything seemed to indicate that the passions of other

men were pale compared to those raging within him. My father stopped short every time he met him, and could not refrain each time from saying, 'A devil, a perfect devil!' But I must introduce you as speedily as possible to my father, the chief character of this story.

"My father was a remarkable man in many respects. He was an artist of rare ability, a self-taught artist, without teachers or schools, principles and rules, carried away only by the thirst for perfection, and treading a path indicated by his own instincts, for reasons unknown, perchance, even to himself. Through some lofty and secret instinct he perceived the presence of a soul in every object. And this secret instinct and personal conviction turned his brush to Christian subjects, grand and lofty to the last degree. His was a strong character: he was an honourable, upright, even rough man, covered with a sort of hard rind without, not entirely lacking in pride, and given to expressing himself both sharply and scornfully about people. He worked for very small results; that is to say, for just enough to support his family and obtain the materials he needed; he never, under any circumstances, refused to aid any one, or to lend a helping hand to a poor artist; and he believed with the simple, reverent faith of his ancestors. At length, by his unintermitting labour and perseverance in the path he had marked out for himself, he began to win the approbation of those who honoured his self-taught talent. They gave him constant orders for churches, and he never lacked employment.

"One of his paintings possessed a strong interest for him. I no longer recollect the exact subject: I only know that he needed to represent the Spirit of Darkness in it. He pondered long what form to give him: he wished to concentrate in his face all that weighs down and oppresses a man. In the midst of his meditations there suddenly occurred to his mind the image of the mysterious usurer; and he thought involuntarily, 'That's how I ought to paint the Devil!' Imagine his amazement when one day, as he was at work in his studio, he heard a knock at the door, and directly after there entered that same terrible usurer.

"'You are an artist?' he said to my father abruptly.

"'I am,' answered my father in surprise, waiting for what should come next.

"Good! Paint my portrait. I may possibly die soon. I have no children; but I do not wish to die completely, I wish to live. Can you paint a portrait that shall appear as though it were alive?"

"My father reflected, 'What could be better! he offers himself for the Devil in my picture.' He promised. They agreed upon a time and price; and the next day my father took palette and brushes and went to the usurer's house. The lofty court-yard, dogs, iron doors and locks, arched windows, coffers, draped with strange covers, and, last of all, the remarkable owner himself, seated motionless before him, all produced a strange impression on him. The windows seemed intentionally so encumbered below that they admitted the light only from the top. 'Devil take him, how well his face is lighted!' he said to himself, and began to paint assiduously, as though afraid that the favourable light would disappear. 'What power!' he repeated to himself. 'If I only accomplish half a likeness of him, as he is now, it will surpass all my other works: he will simply start from the canvas if I am only partly true to nature. What remarkable features!' He redoubled his energy; and began himself to notice how some of his sitter's traits were making their appearance on the canvas.

"But the more closely he approached resemblance, the more conscious he became of an aggressive, uneasy feeling which he could not explain to himself. Notwithstanding this, he set himself to copy with literal accuracy every trait and expression. First of all, however, he busied himself with the eyes. There was so much force in those eyes, that it seemed impossible to reproduce them exactly as they were in nature. But he resolved, at any price, to seek in them the most minute characteristics and shades, to penetrate their secret. As soon, however, as he approached them in resemblance, and began to redouble his exertions, there sprang up in his mind such a terrible feeling of repulsion, of inexplicable expression, that he was forced to lay aside his brush for a while and begin anew. At last he could bear it no longer: he felt as if these eyes were piercing into his soul, and causing intolerable emotion. On the second and third days this grew still stronger. It became horrible to him. He threw down his brush, and declared abruptly that he could paint the stranger no longer. You should have seen how the terrible usurer changed countenance at these words. He threw himself at his feet, and besought him to finish the portrait, saying that his fate and his existence depended on it; that he had

already caught his prominent features; that if he could reproduce them accurately, his life would be preserved in his portrait in a supernatural manner; that by that means he would not die completely; that it was necessary for him to continue to exist in the world.

"My father was frightened by these words: they seemed to him strange and terrible to such a degree, that he threw down his brushes and palette and rushed headlong from the room.

"The thought of it troubled him all day and all night; but the next morning he received the portrait from the usurer, by a woman who was the only creature in his service, and who announced that her master did not want the portrait, and would pay nothing for it, and had sent it back. On the evening of the same day he learned that the usurer was dead, and that preparations were in progress to bury him according to the rites of his religion. All this seemed to him inexplicably strange. But from that day a marked change showed itself in his character. He was possessed by a troubled, uneasy feeling, of which he was unable to explain the cause; and he soon committed a deed which no one could have expected of him. For some time the works of one of his pupils had been attracting the attention of a small circle of connoisseurs and amateurs. My father had perceived his talent, and manifested a particular liking for him in consequence. Suddenly the general interest in him and talk about him became unendurable to my father who grew envious of him. Finally, to complete his vexation, he learned that his pupil had been asked to paint a picture for a recently built and wealthy church. This enraged him. 'No, I will not permit that fledgling to triumph!' said he: 'it is early, friend, to think of consigning old men to the gutters. I still have powers, God be praised! We'll soon see which will put down the other.'

"And this straightforward, honourable man employed intrigues which he had hitherto abhorred. He finally contrived that there should be a competition for the picture which other artists were permitted to enter into. Then he shut himself up in his room, and grasped his brush with zeal. It seemed as if he were striving to summon all his strength up for this occasion. And, in fact, the result turned out to be one of his best works. No one doubted that he would bear off the palm. The pictures were placed on exhibition, and all the others seemed to his as night to day. But of a sudden, one of the members present, an ecclesiastical personage

if I mistake not, made a remark which surprised every one. 'There is certainly much talent in this artist's picture,' said he, 'but no holiness in the faces: there is even, on the contrary, a demoniacal look in the eyes, as though some evil feeling had guided the artist's hand.' All looked, and could not but acknowledge the truth of these words. My father rushed forward to his picture, as though to verify for himself this offensive remark, and perceived with horror that he had bestowed the usurer's eyes upon nearly all the figures. They had such a diabolical gaze that he involuntarily shuddered. The picture was rejected; and he was forced to hear, to his indescribable vexation, that the palm was awarded to his pupil.

"It is impossible to describe the state of rage in which he returned home. He almost killed my mother, he drove the children away, broke his brushes and easels, tore down the usurer's portrait from the wall, demanded a knife, and ordered a fire to be built in the chimney, intending to cut it in pieces and burn it. A friend, an artist, caught him in the act as he entered the room--a jolly fellow, always satisfied with himself, inflated by unattainable wishes, doing daily anything that came to hand, and taking still more gaily to his dinner and little carouses.

"What are you doing? What are you preparing to burn?' he asked, and stepped up to the portrait. 'Why, this is one of your very best works. It is the usurer who died a short time ago: yes, it is a most perfect likeness. You did not stop until you had got into his very eyes. Never did eyes look as these do now.'

"Well, I'll see how they look in the fire!" said my father, making a movement to fling the portrait into the grate.

"Stop, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed his friend, restraining him: 'give it to me, rather, if it offends your eyes to such a degree.' My father resisted, but yielded at length; and the jolly fellow, well pleased with his acquisition, carried the portrait home with him.

"When he was gone, my father felt more calm. The burden seemed to have disappeared from his soul in company with the portrait. He was surprised himself at his evil feelings, his envy, and the evident change in his character. Reviewing his acts, he became sad at heart; and not without

inward sorrow did he exclaim, 'No, it was God who punished me! my picture, in fact, was meant to ruin my brother-man. A devilish feeling of envy guided my brush, and that devilish feeling must have made itself visible in it.'

"He set out at once to seek his former pupil, embraced him warmly, begged his forgiveness, and endeavoured as far as possible to excuse his own fault. His labours continued as before; but his face was more frequently thoughtful. He prayed more, grew more taciturn, and expressed himself less sharply about people: even the rough exterior of his character was modified to some extent. But a certain occurrence soon disturbed him more than ever. He had seen nothing for a long time of the comrade who had begged the portrait of him. He had already decided to hunt him up, when the latter suddenly made his appearance in his room. After a few words and questions on both sides, he said, 'Well, brother, it was not without cause that you wished to burn that portrait. Devil take it, there's something horrible about it! I don't believe in sorcerers; but, begging your pardon, there's an unclean spirit in it.'

"How so?" asked my father.

"Well, from the very moment I hung it up in my room I felt such depression--just as if I wanted to murder some one. I never knew in my life what sleeplessness was; but I suffered not from sleeplessness alone, but from such dreams!--I cannot tell whether they were dreams, or what; it was as if a demon were strangling one: and the old man appeared to me in my sleep. In short, I can't describe my state of mind. I had a sensation of fear, as if expecting something unpleasant. I felt as if I could not speak a cheerful or sincere word to any one: it was just as if a spy were sitting over me. But from the very hour that I gave that portrait to my nephew, who asked for it, I felt as if a stone had been rolled from my shoulders, and became cheerful, as you see me now. Well, brother, you painted the very Devil!"

"During this recital my father listened with unswerving attention, and finally inquired, 'And your nephew now has the portrait?'

"My nephew, indeed! he could not stand it!" said the jolly fellow: 'do you know, the soul of that usurer has migrated into it; he jumps out of the frame, walks about the room; and what my nephew tells of him is

simply incomprehensible. I should take him for a lunatic, if I had not undergone a part of it myself. He sold it to some collector of pictures; and he could not stand it either, and got rid of it to some one else.'

"This story produced a deep impression on my father. He grew seriously pensive, fell into hypochondria, and finally became fully convinced that his brush had served as a tool of the Devil; and that a portion of the usurer's vitality had actually passed into the portrait, and was now troubling people, inspiring diabolical excitement, beguiling painters from the true path, producing the fearful torments of envy, and so forth. Three catastrophes which occurred afterwards, three sudden deaths of wife, daughter, and infant son, he regarded as a divine punishment on him, and firmly resolved to withdraw from the world.

"As soon as I was nine years old, he placed me in an academy of painting, and, paying all his debts, retired to a lonely cloister, where he soon afterwards took the vows. There he amazed every one by the strictness of his life, and his untiring observance of all the monastic rules. The prior of the monastery, hearing of his skill in painting, ordered him to paint the principal picture in the church. But the humble brother said plainly that he was unworthy to touch a brush, that his was contaminated, that with toil and great sacrifice must he first purify his spirit in order to render himself fit to undertake such a task. He increased the rigours of monastic life for himself as much as possible. At last, even they became insufficient, and he retired, with the approval of the prior, into the desert, in order to be quite alone. There he constructed himself a cell from branches of trees, ate only uncooked roots, dragged about a stone from place to place, stood in one spot with his hands lifted to heaven, from the rising until the going down of the sun, reciting prayers without cessation. In this manner did he for several years exhaust his body, invigorating it, at the same time, with the strength of fervent prayer.

"At length, one day he returned to the cloister, and said firmly to the prior, 'Now I am ready. If God wills, I will finish my task.' The subject he selected was the Birth of Christ. A whole year he sat over it, without leaving his cell, barely sustaining himself with coarse food, and praying incessantly. At the end of the year the picture was ready. It was a really wonderful work. Neither prior nor brethren knew much about painting; but all were struck with the marvellous holiness of

the figures. The expression of reverent humility and gentleness in the face of the Holy Mother, as she bent over the Child; the deep intelligence in the eyes of the Holy Child, as though he saw something afar; the triumphant silence of the Magi, amazed by the Divine Miracle, as they bowed at his feet: and finally, the indescribable peace which emanated from the whole picture--all this was presented with such strength and beauty, that the impression it made was magical. All the brethren threw themselves on their knees before it; and the prior, deeply affected, exclaimed, 'No, it is impossible for any artist, with the assistance only of earthly art, to produce such a picture: a holy, divine power has guided thy brush, and the blessing of Heaven rested upon thy labour!'

"By that time I had completed my education at the academy, received the gold medal, and with it the joyful hope of a journey to Italy--the fairest dream of a twenty-year-old artist. It only remained for me to take leave of my father, from whom I had been separated for twelve years. I confess that even his image had long faded from my memory. I had heard somewhat of his grim saintliness, and rather expected to meet a hermit of rough exterior, a stranger to everything in the world, except his cell and his prayers, worn out, tried up, by eternal fasting and penance. But how great was my surprise when a handsome old man stood before me! No traces of exhaustion were visible on his countenance: it beamed with the light of a heavenly joy. His beard, white as snow, and his thin, almost transparent hair of the same silvery hue, fell picturesquely upon his breast, and upon the folds of his black gown, even to the rope with which his poor monastic garb was girded. But most surprising to me of all was to hear from his mouth such words and thoughts about art as, I confess, I long shall bear in mind, and I sincerely wish that all my comrades would do the same.

"'I expected you, my son,' he said, when I approached for his blessing. 'The path awaits you in which your life is henceforth to flow. Your path is pure--desert it not. You have talent: talent is the most priceless of God's gifts--destroy it not. Search out, subject all things to your brush; but in all see that you find the hidden soul, and most of all, strive to attain to the grand secret of creation. Blessed is the elect one who masters that! There is for him no mean object in nature. In lowly themes the artist creator is as great as in great ones: in the despicable there is nothing for him to despise, for it passes through

the purifying fire of his mind. An intimation of God's heavenly paradise is contained for the artist in art, and by that alone is it higher than all else. But by as much as triumphant rest is grander than every earthly emotion, by so much is the lofty creation of art higher than everything else on earth. Sacrifice everything to it, and love it with passion--not with the passion breathing with earthly desire, but a peaceful, heavenly passion. It cannot plant discord in the spirit, but ascends, like a resounding prayer, eternally to God. But there are moments, dark moments--' He paused, and I observed that his bright face darkened, as though some cloud crossed it for a moment. 'There is one incident of my life,' he said. 'Up to this moment, I cannot understand what that terrible being was of whom I painted a likeness. It was certainly some diabolical apparition. I know that the world denies the existence of the Devil, and therefore I will not speak of him. I will only say that I painted him with repugnance: I felt no liking for my work, even at the time. I tried to force myself, and, stifling every emotion in a hard-hearted way, to be true to nature. I have been informed that this portrait is passing from hand to hand, and sowing unpleasant impressions, inspiring artists with feelings of envy, of dark hatred towards their brethren, with malicious thirst for persecution and oppression. May the Almighty preserve you from such passions! There is nothing more terrible.'

"He blessed and embraced me. Never in my life was I so grandly moved. Reverently, rather than with the feeling of a son, I leaned upon his breast, and kissed his scattered silver locks.

"Tears shone in his eyes. 'Fulfil my one request, my son,' said he, at the moment of parting. 'You may chance to see the portrait I have mentioned somewhere. You will know it at once by the strange eyes, and their peculiar expression. Destroy it at any cost.'

"Judge for yourselves whether I could refuse to promise, with an oath, to fulfil this request. In the space of fifteen years I had never succeeded in meeting with anything which in any way corresponded to the description given me by my father, until now, all of a sudden, at an auction--"

The artist did not finish his sentence, but turned his eyes to the wall in order to glance once more at the portrait. The entire throng

of auditors made the same movement, seeking the wonderful portrait with their eyes. But, to their extreme amazement, it was no longer on the wall. An indistinct murmur and exclamation ran through the crowd, and then was heard distinctly the word, "stolen." Some one had succeeded in carrying it off, taking advantage of the fact that the attention of the spectators was distracted by the story. And those present long remained in a state of surprise, not knowing whether they had really seen those remarkable eyes, or whether it was simply a dream which had floated for an instant before their eyesight, strained with long gazing at old pictures.



CAFFIARD - DEUS EX MACHINA

by Guy Wetmore Carryl

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Zut and Other Parisians*

THE studio was tucked away in the extreme upper northeast corner of 13 ter rue Visconti, higher even than that cinquième, dearly beloved of the impecunious, and of whoso, between stairs and street odors, chooses the lesser evil, and is more careful of lungs than legs. After the six long flights had been achieved, around a sharp corner and up a little winding stairway, was the door which bore the name of Pierre Vauquelin. Inside, after stumbling along a narrow hall, as black as Erebus, and floundering through a curtained doorway, one came abruptly into the studio, and, in all probability, fell headlong over a little rattan stool, or an easel, or a box of paints, and was picked up by the host, and dusted, and put to rights, and made much of, like a bumped child. Thus restored to equanimity one was better able to appreciate what Pierre called la Boîte.

The Box was a room eight metres in width by ten in length, with a skylight above, and a great, square window in the north wall, which latter sloped inward from floor to ceiling, by reason of the mansarde roof. Of what might be called furniture there was but little, a Norman cupboard of black wood, heavily carved, a long divan, contrived from

various packing boxes and well-worn rugs, a large, square table, a half dozen chairs, three easels, and a repulsive little stove with an interminable pipe, which, with its many twists and turns, gave one the impression of a thick, black snake, that had, a moment before, been swaying about in the room, and had suddenly found a hole in the roof through which to thrust its head.

But of minor things the Box was full to overflowing. The Norman cupboard was crammed with an assortment of crockery, much of it sadly nicked and cracked, the divan was strewn with boxes of broken pastels, paint-brushes, and palettes coated with dried colors, the table littered with papers, sketches, and books, and every chair had its own particular trap for the unwary, in the form of thumb-tacks or a glass half full of cloudy water: and in the midst of this chaos, late on a certain mid-May afternoon, stood the painter himself, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his corduroy trousers, and his back turned upon the portrait upon which he had been at work. It was evident that something untoward was in the air, because Pierre, who always smoked, was not smoking, and Pierre, who never scowled, was scowling.

In the Quartier--that Quartier which alone, of them all, is spelt with a capital Q--there was, in ordinary, no gayer, more happy-go-lucky type than this same Pierre. He lived, as did a thousand of his kind, on eighty sous a day (there were those who lived on less, pardi!), and breakfasted, and dined, at that,--yes, and paid himself an absinthe at the Deux Magots at six o'clock, and a package of green cigarettes, into the bargain. For the rest of the time, he was understood to be working on a portrait in his studio, and, what is more surprising, often was. There was nothing remarkable about Pierre's portraits, except that occasionally he sold one, and for money--for _actual money_, the astonishing animal! But if any part of the modest proceeds of such a transaction remained, after the rent had been paid and a new canvas purchased, it was not the caisse d'épargne which saw it, be sure of that! For Pierre lived always for the next twenty-four hours, and let the rest of time and eternity look out for themselves.

Yet he took his work seriously. That was the trouble. Even admitting that, thus far, his orders had come only from the more prosperous tradesmen of the Quartier, did that mean, par exemple, that they would not come in time from the millionaires of the sixteenth arrondissement?

By no means, whatever, said Pierre. To be sure, he had never had the Salon in the palm of his hand, so to speak, but what of that? Jean-Paul himself would tell you that it was all favoritism! So Pierre toiled away at his portrait painting, and made a little competency, but, if the truth were told, no appreciable progress from year's beginning to year's end.

For once, however, his luck had played him false. The fat restaurateur, whose wife's portrait he had finished that afternoon and carried at top speed, with the paint not yet dry, to the rue du Bac, was out of town on business, and would not return until the following evening; and that, so far as Pierre was concerned, was quite as bad as if he were not expected until the following year. Pierre's total wealth amounted to one five-franc piece and three sous, and he had been relying upon the restaurateur's four louis, to enable him to fulfill his promise to Mimi. For the next day was her fête, and they were to have breakfasted in the country, and taken a boat upon the Seine, and returned to dine under the trees. Not at Suresnes or St. Cloud, ah, non! Something better than that--the true country, sapristi! at Poissy, twenty-eight kilometres from Paris. All of which meant at least a louis, and, no doubt, more! And where, demanded Pierre of the great north window, where was a louis to be found?

For there was a tacit understanding among the comrades in the Quartier that there must be no borrowing and lending of money. It was a clause of their creed, which had been adopted in the early days of their companionship, for what was, clearly, the greatest general good, the chances being that no one of them would ever possess sufficient surplus capital either to accommodate another or to repay an accommodation. For a moment, to be sure, the thought had crossed Pierre's mind, but he had rejected it instantly as impracticable. Aside from the unwritten compact, there was no one of them all who could have been of service, had he so willed. Even Jacques Courbet, who possessed a disposition which would have impelled him to chop off his right hand with the utmost cheerfulness, if thereby he could have gratified a friend, was worse than useless in this emergency. Had it been a matter of forty sous--but a louis! As well have asked him for the Vénus de Milo, and had done with it.

So it was that, with the premonition of Mimi's disappointed eyes cutting

great gaps in his tender heart, Pierre had four times shrugged his shoulders, and quoted to himself this favorite scrap of his remarkable philosophy,--"Oh, lala! All this will arrange itself!" and four times had paused, in the act of lighting a cigarette, and plunged again into the depths of despondent reverie. As he was on the point of again repeating this entirely futile operation, a distant clock struck six, and Pierre, remembering that Mimi must even now be waiting for him at the west door of St. Germain-des-Prés, clapped on his cap, and sallied forth into the gathering twilight.

It was apéritif hour at the Café des Deux Magots, and the long, leather-covered benches against the windows, and the double row of little marble-topped tables in front were rapidly filling, as Pierre and Mimi took their places, and ordered two Turins à l'eau. A group of American Beaux Arts men at their right were chattering in their uncouth tongue, with occasional scraps of Quartier slang, by way of local color, and now and again hailing a newcomer with exclamations, apparently of satisfaction, which began with "Hello!" The boulevard St. Germain was alive with people, walking past with the admirable lack of haste which distinguishes the Parisian, or waiting, in patient, voluble groups, for a chance to enter the constantly arriving and departing trams and omnibuses; and an unending succession of open cabs filed slowly along the curb, their drivers scanning the terrasse of the café for a possible fare. The air was full of that mingled odor of wet wood pavements and horse-chestnut blossoms, which is the outward, invisible sign of that most wonderful of inward and spiritual combinations--Paris and Spring! And, at the table directly behind Pierre and Mimi sat Caffiard.

There was nothing about Caffiard to suggest a *deus ex machina*, or anything else, for that matter, except a preposterously corpulent old gentleman with an amiable smile. But in nothing were appearances ever more deceitful than in Caffiard. For it was he, with his enormous double chin, and his general air of harmless fatuity, who edited the little colored sheet entitled *La Blague*, which sent half Paris into convulsions of merriment every Thursday morning, and he who knew every caricaturist in town, and was beloved of them all for the heartiness of his appreciation and the liberality of his payments. In the first regard he was but one of many Parisian editors: but in the second he stood without a peer. Caran d'Ache, Léandre, Willette, Forain, Hermann Paul, Abel Faivre--they rubbed their hands when they came out of Caffiard's

private office, and if the day chanced to be Saturday, there was something in their hands worth rubbing. A fine example, Caffiard!

Mimi's black eyes sparkled like a squirrel's as she watched Pierre over the rim of her tumbler of vermouth. She was far from being blind, Mimi, and already, though they had been together but six minutes, she had noted that unusual little pucker between his eyebrows, that sad little droop at the corners of his merry mouth. She told herself that Pierre had been overworking himself, that Pierre was tired, that Pierre needed cheering up. So Mimi, who was never tired, not even after ten hours in Madame Fraichel's millinery establishment, secretly declared war upon the unusual little pucker and the sad little droop.

"Voyons donc, my Pierrot!" she said. "It is not a funeral to which we go to-morrow, at least! Thou must be gay, for we have much to talk of, thou knowest. One dines at La Boîte?"

"The dinner is there, such as it is," replied Pierre gloomily.

"What it is now, is not the question," said Mimi, with confidence, "but what I make of it--pas? And then there is to-morrow! Oh, lala, lalala! What a pleasure it will be, if only the good God gives us beautiful weather. Dis, donc, great thunder-cloud, dost thou know it, this Poissy?"

Pierre had begun a caricature on the back of the wine-card, glancing now and again at his model, an old man selling newspapers on the curb. He shook his head without replying.

"Eh, b'en, my little one, thou mayest believe me that it is of all places the most beautiful! One eats at the Esturgeon, on the Seine,--but _on_ the Seine, with the water quite near, like that chair. He names himself Jarry, the proprietor, and it is a good type--fat and handsome. I adore him! Art thou jealous, species of thinness of a hundred nails? B'en, afterwards, one takes a boat, and goes, softly, softly, down the little arm of the Seine, and creeps under the willows, and, perhaps, fishes. But no, for it is the closed season. But one sings, eh? What does one sing? Voyons!"

She bent forward, and, in a little voice, like an elf's, very thin and

sweet, hummed a snatch of a song they both knew.

— "C'est votre ami Pierrot qui vient vous voir:
Bonsoir, madame la lune!" —

"And then," she went on, as Pierre continued his sketch in silence, "and then, one disembarks at Villennes and has a Turin under the arbors of Bodin. Another handsome type, Bodin! Flut! —What— a man!"

Mimi paused suddenly, and searched his cloudy face with her earnest, tender little eyes.

"Pierrot," she said, softly, "what hast thou? Thou art not angry with thy gosseline?"

Pierre surveyed the outline of the newspaper vender thoughtfully, touched it, here and there, with his pencil-point, squinted, and then pushed the paper toward the girl.

"Not bad," he said, replacing his pencil in his pocket.

But Mimi had no eyes for the caricature, and merely flicked the wine-card to the ground.

"Pierrot"—she repeated.

Vauquelin plunged his hands in his pockets and looked at her.

"Well, then," he announced, almost brutally, "we do not go to-morrow."

"—Pierre!—"

It was going to be much worse than he had supposed, this little tragedy. Bon Dieu, how pretty she was, with her startled, hurt eyes, already filling with tears, and her parted lips, and her little white hand, that had flashed up to her cheek at his words! Oh, much worse than he had supposed! But she must be told: there was nothing but that. So Pierre put his elbows on the table, and his chin in his hands, and brought his face close to hers.

"Voyons!" he explained, "thou dost not believe me angry! Mais non, mais non! But listen. It is I who am the next to the last of idiots, since I have never a sou in pocket, never! And the imbecile restaurateur, whose wife I have been painting, will not return until to-morrow, and so I am not paid. Voilà!"

He placed his five-franc piece upon the table, and shrugged his shoulders.

"One full moon!" he said, and piled the three sous upon it. "And three soldiers. As I sit here, that is all, until to-morrow night. We cannot go!"

Brave little Mimi! Already she was winking back her tears, and smiling.

"But that--that is nothing!" she answered. "I do not care to go. No--but truly! Look! We shall spend the day in the studio, and breakfast on the balcony, and pretend the rue Visconti is the Seine."

"I am an empty siphon!" said Pierre, yielding to desperation.

"_Non!_" said Mimi firmly.

"I am a pierced basket, a box of matches!"

"_Non! Non!_" said Mimi, with tremendous earnestness. "Thou art Pierrot, and I love thee! Let us say no more. I shall go back and prepare the dinner, and thou shalt remain and drink a Pernod. It will give thee heart. But follow quickly. Give me the key."

She laid her wide-spread hand on his, palm upward, like a little pink starfish.

"We go together, and I adore thee!" said Pierre, and kissed her in the sight of all men, and was not ashamed.

* * * *

Caffiard leaned forward, picked up the fallen wine-card, pretended to consult it, and ponderously arose. As Pierre was turning the key in the

door of the little apartment, they heard a sound of heavy breathing, and the *_deus ex machina_* came lumbering up the winding stair.

"Monsieur is seeking some one?" asked the painter politely.

There was no breath left in Caffiard. He was only able, by way of reply, to point at the top button of Pierre's coat, and nod helplessly: then, as Mimi ran ahead to light the gas, he labored along the corridor, staggered through the curtained doorway, stumbled over a rattan stool, was rescued by Pierre, and, finally, established upon the divan, very red and gasping.

For a time there was silence, Pierre and Mimi busying themselves in putting the studio to rights, with an instinctive courtesy which took no notice of their visitor's snorts and wheezes; and Caffiard taking note of his surroundings with his round, blinking eyes. Opposite him, against the wall, reposed the portrait of the restaurateur's wife, as dry and pasty as a stale cream cheese upon the point of crumbling, and on an easel was another--that of Monsieur Pantin, the rich shirt-maker of the boulevard St. Germain--on which Pierre was at work. A veritable atrocity this, with a green background which trespassed upon Monsieur Pantin's hair, and a featureless face, gaunt and haggard with yellow and purple undertones. There was nothing in either picture to refute one's natural suspicion that soap had been the medium employed. Caffiard blinked harder still as his eyes rested upon the portraits, and he secretly consulted the crumpled wine-card in his hand. Then he seemed to recover his breath by means of a profound sigh.

"Monsieur makes caricatures?" he inquired.

"Ah, monsieur," said Pierre, "at times, and for amusement only. I am a portraitist." And he pointed proudly to the picture against the wall.

For they are all alike, these painters--proudest of what they do least well!

"Ah! Then," said Caffiard, with an air of resignation, "I must ask monsieur's pardon, and descend. I am not interested in portraits. When it comes to caricatures"--

"They are well enough in their way," put in Pierre, "but as a serious affair--to sell, for instance--well, monsieur comprehends that one does not debauch one's art!"

Oh, yes, they are all alike, these painters!

"What is serious, what is not serious?" answered Caffiard. "It is all a matter of opinion. One prefers to have his painting glued to the wall of the Salon, next the ceiling, another to have his drawing on the front page of La Blague."

"Oh, naturally La Blague," protested Pierre.

"I am its editor," said Caffiard superbly.

"_Eigh!_" exclaimed Pierre. For Mimi had cruelly pinched his arm. Before the sting had passed, she was seated at Caffiard's side, tugging at the strings of a great portfolio.

"Are they imbeciles, these painters, monsieur?" she was saying. "Now you shall see. This great baby is marvelous, but _marvelous_, with his caricatures. Not Léandre himself--it is I who assure you, monsieur!--and to hear him, one would think--but thou _tirest_ me, Pierrot!--With his portraits! No, it is _too_ much!"

She spread the portfolio wide, and began to shuffle through the drawings it contained.

Caffiard's eyes glistened as he saw them. Even in her enthusiasm, Mimi had not overshot the mark. They were marvelous indeed, these caricatures, mere outlines for the most part, with a dot, here and there, of red, or a little streak of green, which lent them a curious, unusual charm. The subjects were legion. Here was Loubet, with a great band of crimson across his shirt bosom, here Waldeck-Rousseau, with eyes as round and prominent as agate marbles, or Yvette, with a nose on which one might have hung an overcoat, or Chamberlain, all monocle, or Wilhelmina, growing out of a tulip's heart, and as pretty as an old print, with her tight-fitting Dutch cap and brodered bodice. And then a host of types--cochers, grisettes, flower women, camelots, Heaven knows what not!--the products of half a hundred idle hours, wherein

great-hearted, foolish Pierre had builded better than he knew!

Caffiard selected five at random, and then, from a waistcoat pocket that clung as closely to his round figure as if it had been glued thereto, produced a hundred-franc note.

"I must have these for *La Blague*, monsieur," he said. "Bring me two caricatures a week at my office in the rue St. Joseph, and you shall be paid at the same rate. It is not much, to be sure. But you will have ample time left for your--for your portrait-painting, monsieur!"

For a moment the words of Caffiard affected Pierre and Mimi as the stairs had affected Caffiard. They stared at him, opening and shutting their mouths and gasping, like fish newly landed. Then, suddenly, animated by a common impulse, they rushed into each other's arms, and set out, around the studio, in a mad waltz, which presently resolved itself into an impromptu can-can, with Mimi skipping like a fairy, and Pierre singing: "*Hi! _Hi!!_ HI!!!*" and snapping at her flying feet with a red-bordered handkerchief. After this Mimi kissed Caffiard twice: once on the top of his bald head, and once on the end of his stubby nose. It was like being brushed by the floating down of a dandelion. And, finally, nothing would do but that he must accompany them upon the morrow; and she explained to him in detail the plan which had so nearly fallen through, and the *_deus ex machina_* did not betray by so much as a wink that he had heard the entire story only half an hour before.

But, in the end, he protested. But she was insane, the little one, completely! Had he then the air of one who gave himself into those boats there, name of a pipe? But let us be reasonable, voyons! He was not young like Pierre and Mimi--one comprehended that these holidays did not recommence when one was sixty. What should he do, he demanded of them, trailing along, as one might say, he and his odious fatness? Ah, *_non_*! For *la belle jeunesse* was *la belle jeunesse*, there was no means of denying it, and it was not for a species of dried sponge to be giving itself the airs of a fresh flower. "But no! But no!" said Caffiard, striving to rise from the divan. "In the morning I have my article to do for the *Figaro*, and I am going with Caran to Longchamp, en auto, for the races in the afternoon. But no! But no!"

It was plain that Caffiard had known Mimi no more than half an hour. One

never said, "But no! But no!" to Mimi, unless it was for the express purpose of having one's mouth covered by the softest little pink palm to be found between the Seine and the Observatoire,--which, to do him justice, Caffiard was quite capable of scheming to bring about, if only he had known! He had accepted the little dandelion-down kisses in a spirit of philosophy, knowing well that they were given not for his sake, but for Pierre's. But now his protests came to an abrupt termination, for Mimi suddenly seated herself on his lap, and put one arm around his neck.

It was nothing short of an achievement, this. Even Caffiard himself had not imagined that such a thing as his lap was still extant. Yet here was Mimi, actually installed thereon, with her cheek pressed against his, and her breath, which was like clover, stirring the ends of his moustache. But she was smiling at Pierre, the witch! Caffiard could see it out of the corner of his eye.

"Mais non!" he repeated, but more feebly.

"Mais non! Mais non! Mais non!" mocked Mimi. "Great farceur! Will you listen, at least? Eh b'en, voilà! Here is my opinion. As to insanity, if for any one to propose a day in the country is insanity, well then, yes,--I am insane! Soit! And, again, if you wish to appear serious,--in Paris, that is to say--soit, également! But when you speak of odious fatness, you are a type of monsieur extremely low of ceiling, do you know! Moreover, you are going. Voilà! It is finished. As for Caran, let him go his way and draw his caricatures--though they are not like Pierre's, all the world knows!--and, without doubt, his auto will refuse to move beyond the porte Dauphine, yes, and blow up, bon Dieu! when he is in the act of mending it. One knows these boxes of vapors, what they do. And as for the Figaro, b'en, flut! Evidently it will not cease to exist for lack of your article--eh, l'ami? And it is Mimi who asks you,--Mimi, do you understand, who invites you to her fête. And you would refuse her--_toi_!"

"But no! But no!" said Caffiard hurriedly. And meant it.

At this point Pierre wrapped five two-sou pieces in a bit of paper, and tossed them, out of a little window across the hallway, to a street-singer whimpering in the court below. Pierre said that they

weighed down his pockets. They were in the way, the clumsy doublins, said wonderful, spendthrift Pierre!

For the wide sky of the Quartier is forever dotted with little clouds, scudding, scudding, all day long. And when one of these passes across the sun, there is a sudden chill in the air, and one walks for a time in shadow, though the comrade over there, across the way, is still in the warm and golden glow. But when the sun has shouldered the little cloud aside again, ah, that is when life is good to live, and goes gayly, to the tinkle of glasses and the ripple of laughter, and the ring of silver bits. And when the street-singer in the court receives upon his head a little parcel of coppers that are too heavy for the pocket, and smiles to himself, who knows but what he understands?

For what is also true of the Quartier is this--that, in sunshine or shadow, one finds a soft little hand clasping his, firm, warm, encouraging and kindly, and hears a gay little voice that, in foul weather, chatters of the bright hours which it is so sweet to remember, and, in fair, says never a word of the storms which it is so easy to forget!

The veriest bat might have foreseen the end, when once Mimi had put her arm around the neck of Caffiard. Before the *_deus ex machina_* knew what he was about, he found his army of objections routed, horse, foot, and dragoons, and had promised to be at the gare St. Lazare at eleven the following morning.

And what a morning it was! Surely the bon Dieu must have loved Mimi an atom better than other mortals, for in the blue-black crucible of the night he fashioned a day as clear and glowing as a great jewel, and set it, blazing with warm light and vivid color, foremost in the diadem of the year. And it was something to see Mimi at the carriage window, with Pierre at her side and her left hand in his, and in her right a huge bouquet--Caffiard's contribution--while the *_deus ex machina_* himself, breathing like a happy hippopotamus, beamed upon the pair from the opposite corner. So the train slipped past the fortifications, swung through a trim suburb, slid smoothly out into the open country. It was a Wednesday, and there was no holiday crowd to incommode them. They had the compartment to themselves; and the half hour flew like six minutes, said Mimi, when at last they came to a shuddering standstill, and two

guards hastened along the platform in opposite directions, one droning "Poiss-y-y-y-y!" and the other shouting "Poiss! Poiss! Poiss!" as if he had been sneezing. It was an undertaking to get Caffiard out of the carriage, just as it had been to get him in. But finally it was accomplished, a whistle trilled from somewhere as if it had been a bird, another wailed like a stepped-on kitten, the locomotive squealed triumphantly, and the next minute the trio were alone in their glory.

It was a day that Caffiard never forgot. They breakfasted at once, so as to have a longer afternoon. Mimi was guide and commander-in-chief, as having been to the Esturgeon before, so the table was set upon the terrasse overlooking the Seine, and there were radishes, and little individual omelettes, and a famous matelote, which Monsieur Jarry himself served with the air of a Lucullus, and, finally, a great dish of quatre saisons, and, for each of the party, a squat brown pot of fresh cream. And, moreover, no ordinaire, but St. Emilion, if you please, with a tin-foil cap which had to be removed before one could draw the cork, and a bottle of Source Badoit as well. And Caffiard, who had dined with the Russian Ambassador on Monday and breakfasted with the Nuncio on Tuesday, and been egregiously displeased with the fare in both instances, consumed an unprecedented quantity of matelote, and went back to radishes after he had eaten his strawberries and cream: while, to cap the climax, Pierre paid the addition with a louis,--and gave all the change as a tip! But it was unheard-of!

Afterwards they engaged a boat, and, with much alarm on the part of Mimi, and satirical comment from Caffiard, and severe admonitions to prudence by Pierre, pushed out into the stream and headed for Villennes, to the enormous edification of three small boys, who hung precariously over the railing of the terrace above them, and called Caffiard a captive balloon.

They made the three kilometres at a snail's pace, allowing the boat to drift with the current for an hour at a time, and, now and again creeping in under the willows at the water's edge until they were wholly hidden from view, and the voice of Mimi singing was as that of some river nixie invisible to mortal eyes. She sang "Bonsoir, Madame la Lune," so sweetly and so sadly that Caffiard was moved to tears. It was her favorite song, because--oh, because it was about Pierrot! And her own Pierrot responded with a gay soldier ballad, a chanson de route

which he had picked up at the Noctambules; and even Caffiard sang--a ridiculous ditty it was, which scored the English and went to a rollicking air. They all shouted the refrain, convulsed with merriment at the drollery of the sound:--

_"Qu'est ce qui quitte ses père et mère
Afin de s'en aller
S'faire taper dans le nez?
C'est le soldat d'Angleterre!
Dou-gle-di-gle-dum!
Avec les ba-a-a-alles dum-dum!"_

Caffiard was to leave them at Villennes after they should have taken their apéritifs. They protested, stormed at him, scolded and cajoled by turns, and called him a score of fantastic names--for by this time they knew him intimately--as they sat in Monsieur Bodin's arbor and sipped amer-menthe, but all in vain. Pierre had Mimi's hand, as always, and he had kissed her a half-hundred times in the course of the afternoon. Mimi had a way of shaking her hair out of her eyes with a curious little backward jerk of her head when Pierre kissed her, and then looking at him seriously, seriously, but smiling when he caught her at it. Caffiard liked that. And Pierre had a trick of turning, as if to ask Mimi's opinion, or divine even her unspoken wishes whenever a question came up for decision--a choice of food or drink, or direction, or what-not. And Caffiard liked _that_.

He looked across the table at them now, dreamily, through his cigarette smoke.

"Pierrot," he said, after he had persuaded them to let him depart in peace when the train should be due,--"Pierrot. Yes, that is it. You, with your garret, and your painting, and your songs, and your black, black sadness at one moment, and your laughter the next, and, above all, your Pierrette, your bon-bon of a Pierrette:--you are Pierrot, the spirit of Paris in powder and white muslin! Eigho! my children, what a thing it is, la belle jeunesse! Tiens! you have given me a taste of it to-day, and I thank you. I thought I had forgotten. But no, one never forgets. It all comes back,--youth, and strength, and beauty, love, and music, and laughter,--but only like a breath upon a mirror, my children, only like a wind-ripple on a pool; for I am an old man."

He paused, looking up at the vine-leaves on the trellis-roof, and murmured a few words of Mimi's song:--

_"Pierrette en songe va venir me voir:
Bonsoir, madame la lune!"_

Then his eyes came back to her face.

"I must be off," he said. "Why, what hast thou, little one? There are tears in those two stars!"

"C'est vrai?" asked Mimi, smiling at him and then at Pierre, and brushing her hand across her eyes, "c'est vrai? Well then, they are gone as quickly as they came. Voilà! Without his tears Pierrot is not Pierrot, and without Pierrot"--

She turned to Pierre suddenly, and buried her face on his shoulder.

"_Je t'aime!_" she whispered. "_Je t'aime!_"



WOMEN – A PROSE POEM

By Meyer Blinkin, Translator: Helena Frank

From The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Yiddish Tales*

Hedged round with tall, thick woods, as though designedly, so that no one should know what happens there, lies the long-drawn-out old town of Pereyaslav.

To the right, connected with Pereyaslav by a wooden bridge, lies another bit of country, named--Pidvorkes.

The town itself, with its long, narrow, muddy streets, with the crowded houses propped up one against the other like tombstones, with their meagre grey walls all to pieces, with the broken window-panes stuffed with rags--well, the town of Pereyaslav was hardly to be distinguished

from any other town inhabited by Jews.

Here, too, people faded before they bloomed. Here, too, men lived on miracles, were fruitful and multiplied out of all season and reason. They talked of a livelihood, of good times, of riches and pleasures, with the same appearance of firm conviction, and, at the same time the utter disbelief, with which one tells a legend read in a book.

And they really supposed these terms to be mere inventions of the writers of books and nothing more! For not only were they incapable of a distinct conception of their real meaning, but some had even given up the very hope of ever being able to earn so much as a living, and preferred not to reach out into the world with their thoughts, straining them for nothing, that is, for the sake of a thing so plainly out of the question as a competence. At night the whole town was overspread by a sky which, if not grey with clouds, was of a troubled and washed-out blue. But the people were better off than by day. Tired out, overwrought, exhausted, prematurely aged as they were, they sought and found comfort in the lap of the dreamy, secret, inscrutable night. Their misery was left far behind, and they felt no more grief and pain.

An unknown power hid everything from them as though with a thick, damp, stone wall, and they heard and saw nothing.

They did not hear the weak voices, like the mewing of blind kittens, of their pining children, begging all day for food as though on purpose--as though they knew there was none to give them. They did not hear the sighs and groans of their friends and neighbors, filling the air with the hoarse sound of furniture dragged across the floor; they did not see, in sleep, Death-from-hunger swing quivering, on threads of spider-web, above their heads.

Even the little fires that flickered feverishly on their hearths, and testified to the continued existence of breathing men, even these they saw no longer. Silence cradled everything to sleep, extinguished it, and caused it to be forgotten.

Hardly, however, was it dawn, hardly had the first rays pierced beneath the closed eyelids, before a whole world of misery awoke and came to life again.

The frantic cries of hundreds of starving children, despairing exclamations and imprecations and other piteous sounds filled the air. One gigantic curse uncoiled and crept from house to house, from door to door, from mouth to mouth, and the population began to move, to bestir themselves, to run hither and thither.

Half-naked, with parched bones and shrivelled skin, with sunken yet burning eyes, they crawled over one another like worms in a heap, fastened on to the bites in each other's mouth, and tore them away--

But this is summer, and they are feeling comparatively cheerful, bold, and free in their movements. They are stifled and suffocated, they are in a melting-pot with heat and exhaustion, but there are counter-balancing advantages; one can live for weeks at a time without heating the stove; indeed, it is pleasanter indoors without fire, and lighting will cost very little, now the evenings are short.

In winter it was different. An inclement sky, an enfeebled sun, a sick day, and a burning, biting frost!

People, too, were different. A bitterness came over them, and they went about anxious and irritable, with hanging head, possessed by gloomy despair. It never even occurred to them to tear their neighbor's bite out of his mouth, so depressed and preoccupied did they become. The days were months, the evenings years, and the weeks--oh! the weeks were eternities!

And no one knew of their misery but the winter wind that tore at their roofs and howled in their all but smokeless chimneys like one bewitched, like a lost soul condemned to endless wandering.

But there were bright stars in the abysmal darkness; their one pride and consolation were the Pidvorkes, the inhabitants of the aforementioned district of that name. Was it a question of the upkeep of a Reader or of a bath, the support of a burial-society, of a little hospital or refuge, a Rabbi, of providing Sabbath loaves for the poor, flour for the Passover, the dowry of a needy bride--the Pidvorkes were ready! The sick and lazy, the poverty-stricken and hopeless, found in them support and protection. The Pidvorkes! They were an inexhaustible well that no one

had ever found to fail them, unless the Pidvorke husbands happened to be present, on which occasion alone one came away with empty hands.

The fair fame of the Pidvorkes extended beyond Pereyaslav to all poor towns in the neighborhood. Talk of husbands--they knew about the Pidvorkes a hundred miles round; the least thing, and they pointed out to their wives how they should take a lesson from the Pidvorke women, and then they would be equally rich and happy.

It was not because the Pidvorkes had, within their border, great, green velvety hills and large gardens full of flowers that they had reason to be proud, or others, to be proud of them; not because wide fields, planted with various kinds of corn, stretched for miles around them, the delicate ears swaying in sunshine and wind; not even because there flowed round the Pidvorkes a river so transparent, so full of the reflection of the sky, you could not decide which was the bluest of the two. Pereyaslav at any rate was not affected by any of these things, perhaps knew nothing of them, and certainly did not wish to know anything, for whoso dares to let his mind dwell on the like, sins against God. Is it a Jewish concern? A townful of men who have a God, and religious duties to perform, with reward and punishment, who have _that_ world to prepare for, and a wife and children in _this_ one, people must be mad (of the enemies of Zion be it said!) to stare at the sky, the fields, the river, and all the rest of it--things which a man on in years ought to blush to talk about.

No, they are proud of the Pidvorke women, and parade them continually. The Pidvorke women are no more attractive, no taller, no cleverer than others. They, too, bear children and suckle them, one a year, after the good old custom; neither are they more thought of by their husbands. On the contrary, they are the best abused and tormented women going, and herein lies their distinction.

They put up, with the indifference of all women alike, to the belittling to which they are subjected by their husbands; they swallow their contempt by the mouthful without a reproach, and yet they are exceptions; and yet they are distinguished from all other women, as the rushing waters of the Dnieper from the stagnant pools in the marsh.

About five in the morning, when the men-folk turn in bed, and bury their

faces in the white feather pillows, emitting at the same time strange, broken sounds through their big, stupid, red noses--at this early hour their wives have transacted half-a-day's business in the market-place. Dressed in short, light skirts with blue aprons, over which depends on their left a large leather pocket for the receiving of coin and the giving out of change--one cannot be running every minute to the cash-box--they stand in their shops with miscellaneous ware, and toil hard. They weigh and measure, buy and sell, and all this with wonderful celerity. There stands one of them by herself in a shop, and tries to persuade a young, barefoot peasant woman to buy the printed cotton she offers her, although the customer only wants a red cotton with a large, flowery pattern. She talks without a pause, declaring that the young peasant may depend upon her, she would not take her in for the world, and, indeed, to no one else would she sell the article so cheap. But soon her eye catches two other women pursuing a peasant man, and before even making out whether he has any wares with him or not, she leaves her customer and joins them. If they run, she feels so must she. The peasant is sure to be wanting grease or salt, and that may mean ten kopeks' unexpected gain. Meantime she is not likely to lose her present customer, fascinated as the latter must be by her flow of speech.

So she leaves her, and runs after the peasant, who is already surrounded by a score of women, shrieking, one louder than the other, praising their ware to the skies, and each trying to make him believe that he and she are old acquaintances. But presently the tumult increases, there is a cry, "Cheap fowls, who wants cheap fowls?" Some rich landholder has sent out a supply of fowls to sell, and all the women swing round towards the fowls, keeping a hold on the peasant's cart with their left hand, so that you would think they wanted to drag peasant, horse, and cart along with them. They bargain for a few minutes with the seller of fowls, and advise him not to be obstinate and to take their offers, else he will regret it later.

Suddenly a voice thunders, "The peasants are coming!" and they throw themselves as for dear life upon the cart-loads of produce; they run as though to a conflagration, get under each other's feet, their eyes glisten as though they each wanted to pull the whole market aside. There is a shrieking and scolding, until one or another gets the better of the rest, and secures the peasant's wares. Then only does each woman remember that she has customers waiting in her shop, and she runs in

with a beaming smile and tells them that, as they have waited so long, they shall be served with the best and the most beautiful of her store.

By eight o'clock in the morning, when the market is over, when they have filled all the bottles left with them by their customers, counted up the change and their gains, and each one has slipped a coin into her knotted handkerchief, so that her husband should not know of its existence (one simply must! One is only human--one is surely not expected to wrangle with him about every farthing?)--then, when there is nothing more to be done in the shops, they begin to gather in knots, and every one tells at length the incidents and the happy strokes of business of the day. They have forgotten all the bad luck they wished each other, all the abuse they exchanged, while the market was in progress; they know that "Parnosseh is Parnosseh," and bear no malice, or, if they do, it is only if one has spoken unkindly of another during a period of quiet, on a Sabbath or a holiday.

Each talks with a special enthusiasm, and deep in her sunken eyes with their blue-black rings there burns a proud, though tiny, fire, as she recalls how she got the better of a customer, and sold something which she had all but thrown away, and not only sold it, but better than usual; or else they tell how late their husbands sleep, and then imagine their wives are still in bed, and set about waking them, "It's time to get up for the market," and they at once pretend to be sleepy--then, when they have already been and come back!

And very soon a voice is heard to tremble with pleasant excitement, and a woman begins to relate the following:

"Just you listen to me: I was up to-day when God Himself was still asleep."--"That is not the way to talk, Sheine!" interrupts a second.--"Well, well, well?" (there is a good deal of curiosity). "And what happened?"--"It was this way: I went out quietly, so that no one should hear, not to wake them, because when Lezer went to bed, it was certainly one o'clock. There was a dispute of some sort at the Rabbi's. You can imagine how early it was, because I didn't even want to wake Soreh, otherwise she always gets up when I do (never mind, it won't hurt her to learn from her mother!). And at half past seven, when I saw there were no more peasants coming in to market, I went to see what was going on indoors. I heard my man calling me to wake up: 'Sheine, Sheine,

Sheine!" and I go quietly and lean against the bed, and wait to hear what will happen next. 'Look here!--There is no waking her!--Sheine! It's getting-up time and past! Are you deaf or half-witted? What's come to you this morning?' I was so afraid I should laugh. I gave a jump and called out, O woe is me, why ever didn't you wake me sooner? Bandit! It's already eight o'clock!"

Her hearers go off into contented laughter, which grows clearer, softer, more contented still. Each one tells her tale of how she was wakened by her husband, and one tells this joke: Once, when her husband had called to rouse her (he also usually woke her after market), she answered that on that morning she did not intend to get up for market, that he might go for once instead. This apparently pleases them still better, for their laughter renews itself, more spontaneous and hearty even than before. Each makes a witty remark, each feels herself in merry mood, and all is cheerfulness.

They would wax a little more serious only when they came to talk of their daughters. A woman would begin by trying to recall her daughter's age, and beg a second one to help her remember when the girl was born, so that she might not make a mistake in the calculation. And when it came to one that had a daughter of sixteen, the mother fell into a brown study; she felt herself in a very, very critical position, because when a girl comes to that age, one ought soon to marry her. And there is really nothing to prevent it: money enough will be forthcoming, only let the right kind of suitor present himself, one, that is, who shall insist on a well-dowered bride, because otherwise--what sort of a suitor do you call that? She will have enough to live on, they will buy a shop for her, she is quite capable of managing it--only let Heaven send a young man of acceptable parentage, so that one's husband shall have no need to blush with shame when he is asked about his son-in-law's family and connections.

And this is really what they used to do, for when their daughters were sixteen, they gave them in marriage, and at twenty the daughters were "old," much-experienced wives. They knew all about teething, chicken-pox, measles, and more besides, even about croup. If a young mother's child fell ill, she hastened to her bosom crony, who knew a lot more than she, having been married one whole year or two sooner, and got advice as to what should be done.

The other would make close inquiry whether the round swellings about the child's neck increased in size and wandered, that is, appeared at different times and different places, in which case it was positively nothing serious, but only the tonsils. But if they remained in one place and grew larger, the mother must lose no time, but must run to the doctor.

Their daughters knew that they needed to lay by money, not only for a dowry, but because a girl ought to have money of her own. They knew as well as their mothers that a bridegroom would present himself and ask a lot of money (the best sign of his being the right sort!), and they prayed God for the same without ceasing.

No sooner were they quit of household matters than they went over to the discussion of their connections and alliances--it was the greatest pleasure they had.

The fact that their children, especially their daughters, were so discreet that not one (to speak in a good hour and be silent in a bad!) had as yet ever (far be it from the speaker to think of such a thing!) given birth to a bastard, as was known to happen in other places--this was the crowning point of their joy and exultation.

It even made up to them for the other fact, that they never got a good word from their husbands for their hard, unnatural toil.

And as they chat together, throwing in the remark that "the apple never falls far from the tree," that their daughters take after them in everything, the very wrinkles vanish from their shrivelled faces, a spring of refreshment and blessedness wells up in their hearts, they are lifted above their cares, a feeling of relaxation comes over them, as though a soothing balsam had penetrated their strained and weary limbs.

Meantime the daughters have secrets among themselves. They know a quantity of interesting things that have happened in their quarter, but no one else gets to know of them; they are imparted more with the eyes than with the lips, and all is quiet and confidential.

And if the great calamity had not now befallen the Pidvorkes, had it not

stretched itself, spread its claws with such an evil might, had the shame not been so deep and dreadful, all might have passed off quietly as always. But the event was so extraordinary, so cruelly unique--such a thing had not happened since girls were girls, and bridegrooms, bridegrooms, in the Pidvorkes--that it inevitably became known to all. Not (preserve us!) to the men--they know of nothing, and need to know of nothing--only to the women. But how much can anyone keep to oneself? It will rise to the surface, and lie like oil on the water.

From early morning on the women have been hissing and steaming, bubbling and boiling over. They are not thinking of Parnosseh; they have forgotten all about Parnosseh; they are in such a state, they have even forgotten about themselves. There is a whole crowd of them packed like herrings, and all fire and flame. But the male passer-by hears nothing of what they say, he only sees the troubled faces and the drooping heads; they are ashamed to look into one another's eyes, as though they themselves were responsible for the great affliction. An appalling misfortune, an overwhelming sense of shame, a yellow-black spot on their reputation weighs them to the ground. Uncleanliness has forced itself into their sanctuary and defiled it; and now they seek a remedy, and means to save themselves, like one drowning; they want to heal the plague spot, to cover it up, so that no one shall find it out. They stand and think, and wrinkle the brows so used to anxiety; their thoughts evolve rapidly, and yet no good result comes of it, no one sees a way of escape out of the terrifying net in which the worst of all evil has entangled them. Should a stranger happen to come upon them now, one who has heard of them, but never seen them, he would receive a shock. The whole of Pidvorkes looks quite different, the women, the streets, the very sun shines differently, with pale and narrow beams, which, instead of cheering, seem to burden the heart.

The little grey-curved clouds with their ragged edges, which have collected somewhere unbeknown, and race across the sky, look down upon the women, and whisper among themselves. Even the old willows, for whom the news is no novelty, for many more and more complicated mysteries have come to their knowledge, even they look sad, while the swallows, by the depressed and gloomy air with which they skim the water, plainly express their opinion, which is no other than this: God is punishing the Pidvorkes for _their_ great sin, what time they carried fire in their beaks, long ago, to destroy the Temple.

God bears long with people's iniquity, but he rewards in full at the last.

The peasants driving slowly to market, unmolested and unobstructed, neither dragged aside nor laid forcible hold of, were singularly disappointed. They began to think the Jews had left the place.

And the women actually forgot for very trouble that it was market-day. They stood with hands folded, and turned feverishly to every newcomer. What does she say to it? Perhaps she can think of something to advise.

No one answered; they could not speak; they had nothing to say; they only felt that a great wrath had been poured out on them, heavy as lead, that an evil spirit had made its way into their life, and was keeping them in a perpetual state of terror; and that, were they now to hold their peace, and not make an end, God Almighty only knows what might come of it! No one felt certain that to-morrow or the day after the same thunderbolt might not fall on another of them.

Somebody made a movement in the crowd, and there was a sudden silence, as though all were preparing to listen to a weak voice, hardly louder than stillness itself. Their eyes widened, their faces were contracted with annoyance and a consciousness of insult. Their hearts beat faster, but without violence. Suddenly there was a shock, a thrill, and they looked round with startled gaze, to see whence it came, and what was happening. And they saw a woman forcing her way frantically through the crowd, her hands working, her lips moving as in fever, her eyes flashing fire, and her voice shaking as she cried: "Come on and see me settle them! First I shall thrash him, and then I shall go for her! We must make a cinder-heap of them; it's all we can do."

She was a tall, bony woman, with broad shoulders, who had earned for herself the nickname Cossack, by having, with her own hands, beaten off three peasants who wanted to strangle her husband, he, they declared, having sold them by false weight--it was the first time he had ever tried to be of use to her.

"But don't shout so, Breindel!" begged a woman's voice.

"What do you mean by 'don't shout'! Am I going to hold my tongue? Never you mind, I shall take no water into my mouth. I'll teach them, the apostates, to desecrate the whole town!"

"But don't shout so!" beg several more.

Breindel takes no notice. She clenches her right fist, and, fighting the air with it, she vociferates louder than ever:

"What has happened, women? What are you frightened of? Look at them, if they are not all a little afraid! That's what brings trouble. Don't let us be frightened, and we shall spare ourselves in the future. We shall not be in terror that to-morrow or the day after (they had best not live to hear of it, sweet Father in Heaven!) another of us should have this come upon her!"

Breindel's last words made a great impression. The women started as though someone had poured cold water over them without warning. A few even began to come forward in support of Breindel's proposal. Soreh Leoh said: She advised going, but only to him, the bridegroom, and telling him not to give people occasion to laugh, and not to cause distress to her parents, and to agree to the wedding's taking place to-day or to-morrow, before anything happened, and to keep quiet.

"I say, he shall not live to see it; he shall not be counted worthy to have us come begging favors of him!" cried an angry voice.

But hereupon rose that of a young woman from somewhere in the crowd, and all the others began to look round, and no one knew who it was speaking. At first the young voice shook, then it grew firmer and firmer, so that one could hear clearly and distinctly what was said:

"You might as well spare yourselves the trouble of talking about a thrashing; it's all nonsense; besides, why add to her parents' grief by going to them? Isn't it bad enough for them already? If we really want to do something, the best would be to say nothing to anybody, not to get excited, not to ask anybody's help, and let us make a collection out of our own pockets. Never mind! God will repay us twice what we give. Let us choose out two of us, to take him the money quietly, so that no one shall know, because once a whisper of it gets abroad, it will be carried

over seven seas in no time; you know that walls have ears, and streets, eyes."

The women had been holding their breath and looking with pleasurable pride at young Malkehle, married only two months ago and already so clever! The great thick wall of dread and shame against which they had beaten their heads had retreated before Malkehle's soft words; they felt eased; the world grew lighter again. Every one felt envious in her heart of hearts of her to whose apt and golden speech they had just listened. Everyone regretted that such an excellent plan had not occurred to herself. But they soon calmed down, for after all it was a sister who had spoken, one of their own Pidvorkes. They had never thought that Malkehle, though she had been considered clever as a girl, would take part in their debate; and they began to work out a plan for getting together the necessary money, only so quietly that not a cock should crow.

And now their perplexities began! Not one of them could give such a great sum, and even if they all clubbed together, it would still be impossible. They could manage one hundred, two hundred, three hundred rubles, but the dowry was six hundred, and now he says, that unless they give one thousand, he will break off the engagement. What, says he, there will be a summons out against him? Very likely! He will just risk it. The question went round: Who kept a store in a knotted handkerchief, hidden from her husband? They each had such a store, but were all the contents put together, the half of the sum would not be attained, not by a long way.

And again there arose a tempest, a great confusion of women's tongues. Part of the crowd started with fiery eloquence to criticise their husbands, the good-for-nothings, the slouching lazybones; they proved that as their husbands did nothing to earn money, but spent all their time "learning," there was no need to be afraid of them; and if once in a way they wanted some for themselves, nobody had the right to say them nay. Others said that the husbands were, after all, the elder, one must and should ask their advice! They were wiser and knew best, and why should they, the women (might the words not be reckoned as a sin!), be wiser than the rest of the world put together? And others again cried that there was no need that they should divorce their husbands because a girl was with child, and the bridegroom demanded the dowry twice over.

The noise increased, till there was no distinguishing one voice from another, till one could not make out what her neighbor was saying: she only knew that she also must shriek, scold, and speak her mind. And who knows what would have come of it, if Breindel-Cossack, with her powerful gab, had not begun to shout, that she and Malkehle had a good idea, which would please everyone very much, and put an end to the whole dispute.

All became suddenly dumb; there was a tense silence, as at the first of the two recitals of the Eighteen Benedictions; the women only cast inquiring looks at Malkehle and Breindel, who both felt their cheeks hot. Breindel, who, ever since the wise Malkehle had spoken such golden words, had not left her side, now stepped forward, and her voice trembled with emotion and pleasant excitement as she said: "Malkehle and I think like this: that we ought to go to Chavvehle, she being so wise and so well-educated, a doctor's wife, and tell her the whole story from beginning to end, so that she may advise us, and if you are ashamed to speak to her yourselves, you should leave it to us two, only on the condition that you go with us. Don't be frightened, she is kind; she will listen to us."

A faint smile, glistening like diamond dust, shone on all faces; their eyes brightened and their shoulders straightened, as though just released from a heavy burden. They all knew Chavvehle for a good and gracious woman, who was certain to give them some advice; she did many such kindnesses without being asked; she had started the school, and she taught their children for nothing; she always accompanied her husband on his visits to the sick-room, and often left a coin of her own money behind to buy a fowl for the invalid. It was even said that she had written about them in the newspapers! She was very fond of them. When she talked with them, her manner was simple, as though they were her equals, and she would ask them all about everything, like any plain Jewish housewife. And yet they were conscious of a great distance between them and Chavveh. They would have liked Chavveh to hear nothing of them but what was good, to stand justified in her eyes as (ten times lehavdil) in those of a Christian. They could not have told why, but the feeling was there.

They are proud of Chavveh; it is an honor for them each and all (and who

are they that they should venture to pretend to it?) to possess such a Chavveh, who was highly spoken of even by rich Gentiles. Hence this embarrassed smile at the mention of her name; she would certainly advise, but at the same time they avoided each other's look. The wise Malkeh had the same feeling, but she was able to cheer the rest. Never mind! It doesn't matter telling her. She is a Jewish daughter, too, and will keep it to herself. These things happen behind the "high windows" also. Whereupon they all breathed more freely, and went up the hill to Chavveh. They went in serried ranks, like soldiers, shoulder to shoulder, relief and satisfaction reflected in their faces. All who met them made way for them, stood aside, and wondered what it meant. Some of their own husbands even stood and looked at the marching women, but not one dared to go up to them and ask what was doing. Their object grew dearer to them at every step. A settled resolve and a deep sense of goodwill to mankind urged them on. They all felt that they were going in a good cause, and would thereby bar the road to all such occurrences in the future.

The way to Chavveh was long. She lived quite outside the Pidvorkes, and they had to go through the whole market-place with the shops, which stood close to one another, as though they held each other by the hand, and then only through narrow lanes of old thatched peasant huts, with shy little window-panes. But beside nearly every hut stood a couple of acacia-trees, and the foam-white blossoms among the young green leaves gave a refreshing perfume to the neighborhood. Emerging from the streets, they proceeded towards a pretty hill planted with pink-flowering quince-trees. A small, clear stream flowed below it to the left, so deceptively clear that it reflected the hillside in all its natural tints. You had to go quite close in order to make sure it was only a delusion, when the stream met your gaze as seriously as though there were no question of it at all.

On the top of the hill stood Chavveh's house, adorned like a bride, covered with creepers and quinces, and with two large lamps under white glass shades, upheld in the right hands of two statues carved in white marble. The distance had not wearied them; they had walked and conversed pleasantly by the way, each telling a story somewhat similar to the one that had occasioned their present undertaking.

"Do you know," began Shifreh, the wholesale dealer, "mine tried to play

me a trick with the dowry, too? It was immediately before the ceremony, and he insisted obstinately that unless a silver box and fifty rubles were given to him in addition to what had been promised to him, he would not go under the marriage canopy!"

"Well, if it hadn't been Zorah, it would have been Chayyim Treitel," observed some one, ironically.

They all laughed, but rather weakly, just for the sake of laughing; not one of them really wished to part from her husband, even in cases where he disliked her, and they quarrelled. No indignity they suffered at their husbands' hands could hurt them so deeply as a wish on his part to live separately. After all they are man and wife. They quarrel and make it up again.

And when they spied Chavvehle's house in the distance, they all cried out joyfully, with one accord:

"There is Chavvehle's house!" Once more they forgot about themselves; they were filled with enthusiasm for the common cause, and with a pain that will lie forever at their heart should they not do all that sinful man is able.

The wise Malkehle's heart beat faster than anyone's. She had begun to consider how she should speak to Chavvehle, and although apt, incisive phrases came into her head, one after another, she felt that she would never be able to come out with them in Chavvehle's presence; were it not for the other women's being there, she would have felt at her ease.

All of a sudden a voice exclaimed joyfully, "There we are at the house!" All lifted their heads, and their eyes were gladdened by the sight of the tall flowers arranged about a round table, in the shelter of a widely-branching willow, on which there shone a silver samovar. In and out of the still empty tea-glasses there stole beams of the sinking sun, as it dropt lower and lower behind the now dark-blue hill.

"What welcome guests!" Chavveh met them with a sweet smile, and her eyes awoke answering love and confidence in the women's hearts.

Not a glance, not a movement betrayed surprise on Chavvehle's part, any

more than if she had been expecting them everyone.

They felt that she was behaving like any sage, and were filled with a sense of guilt towards her.

Chavvehle excused herself to one or two other guests who were present, and led the women into her summer-parlor, for she had evidently understood that what they had come to say was for her ears only.

They wanted to explain at once, but they couldn't, and the two who of all found it hardest to speak were the selected spokeswomen, Breindel-Cossack and Malkehle the wise. Chavvehle herself tried to lead them out of their embarrassment.

"You evidently have something important to tell me," she said, "for otherwise one does not get a sight of you."

And now it seemed more difficult than ever, it seemed impossible ever to tell the angelic Chavvehle of the bad action about which they had come. They all wished silently that their children might turn out one-tenth as good as she was, and their impulse was to take Chavvehle into their arms, kiss her and hug her, and cry a long, long time on her shoulder; and if she cried with them, it would be so comforting.

Chavvehle was silent. Her great, wide-open blue eyes grew more and more compassionate as she gazed at the faces of her sisters; it seemed as though they were reading for themselves the sorrowful secret the women had come to impart.

And the more they were impressed with her tactful behavior, and the more they felt the kindness of her gaze, the more annoyed they grew with themselves, the more tongue-tied they became. The silence was so intense as to be almost seen and felt. The women held their breath, and only exchanged roundabout glances, to find out what was going on in each other's mind; and they looked first of all at the two who had undertaken to speak, while the latter, although they did not see this, felt as if every one's gaze was fixed upon them, wondering why they were silent and holding all hearts by a thread.

Chavvehle raised her head, and spoke sweetly:

"Well, dear sisters, tell me a little of what it is about. Do you want my help in any matter? I should be so glad----

"Dear sisters" she called them, and lightning-like it flashed through their hearts that Chavveh was, indeed, their sister. How could they feel otherwise when they had it from Chavveh herself? Was she not one of their own people? Had she not the same God? True, her speech was a little strange to them, and she was not overpious, but how should God be angry with such a Chavveh as this? If it must be, let him punish them for her sin; they would willingly suffer in her place.

The sun had long set; the sky was grey, save for one red streak, and the room had grown dark. Chavvehle rose to light the candles, and the women started and wiped their tearful eyes, so that Chavveh should not remark them. Chavveh saw the difficulty they had in opening their hearts to her, and she began to speak to them of different things, offered them refreshment according to their several tastes, and now Malkehle felt a little more courageous, and managed to say:

"No, good, kind Chavvehle, we are not hungry. We have come to consult with you on a very important matter!"

And then Breindel tried hard to speak in a soft voice, but it sounded gruff and rasping:

"First of all, Chavveh, we want you to speak to us in Yiddish, not in Polish. We are all Jewish women, thank God, together!"

Chavvehle, who had nodded her head during the whole of Breindel's speech, made another motion of assent with her silken eyebrows, and replied:

"I will talk Yiddish to you with pleasure, if that is what you prefer."

"The thing is this, Chavvehle," began Shifreh, the wholesale dealer, "it is a shame and a sorrow to tell, but when the thunderbolt has fallen, one must speak. You know Rochel Esther Leoh's. She is engaged, and the wedding was to have been in eight weeks--and now she, the good-for-nothing, is with child--and he, the son of perdition, says now

that if he isn't given more than five hundred rubles, he won't take her----"

Chavvehle was deeply troubled by their words. She saw how great was their distress, and found, to her regret, that she had little to say by way of consolation.

"I feel with you," she said, "in your pain. But do not be so dismayed. It is certainly very bad news, but these things will happen, you are not the first----"

She wanted to say more, but did not know how to continue.

"But what are we to do?" asked several voices at once. "That is what we came to you for, dearie, for you to advise us. Are we to give him all the money he asks, or shall they both know as much happiness as we know what to do else? Or are we to hang a stone round our necks and drown ourselves for shame? Give us some advice, dear, help us!"

Then Chavvehle understood that it was not so much the women who were speaking and imploring, as their stricken hearts, their deep shame and grief, and it was with increased sympathy that she answered them:

"What can I say to help you, dear sisters? You have certainly not deserved this blow; you have enough to bear as it is--things ought to have turned out quite differently; but now that the misfortune has happened, one must be brave enough not to lose one's head, and not to let such a thing happen again, so that it should be the first and last time! But what exactly you should do, I cannot tell you, because I don't know! Only if you should want my help or any money, I will give you either with the greatest pleasure."

They understood each other----

The women parted with Chavveh in great gladness, and turned towards home conscious of a definite purpose. Now they all felt they knew just what to do, and were sure it would prevent all further misfortune and disgrace.

They could have sung out for joy, embraced the hill, the stream, the

peasant huts, and kissed and fondled them all together. Mind you, they had even now no definite plan of action, it was just Chavvehle's sympathy that had made all the difference--feeling that Chavveh was with them! Wrapped in the evening mist, they stepped vigorously and cheerily homewards.

Gradually the speed and the noise of their march increased, the air throbbed, and at last a high, sharp voice rose above the rest, whereupon they grew stiller, and the women listened.

"I tell you what, we won't beat them. Only on Sabbath we must all come together like one man, break into the house-of-study just before they call up to the Reading of the Law, and not let them read till they have sworn to agree to our sentence of excommunication!

"She is right!"

"Excommunicate him!"

"Tear him in pieces!"

"Let him be dressed in robe and prayer-scarf, and swear by the eight black candles that he----"

"Swear! Swear!"

The noise was dreadful. No one was allowed to finish speaking. They were all aflame with one fire of revenge, hate, and anger, and all alike athirst for justice. Every new idea, every new suggestion was hastily and hotly seized upon by all together, and there was a grinding of teeth and a clenching of fists. Nature herself seemed affected by the tumult, the clouds flew faster, the stars changed their places, the wind whistled, the trees swayed hither and thither, the frogs croaked, there was a great boiling up of the whole concern.

"Women, women," cried one, "I propose that we go to the court of the Shool, climb into the round millstones, and all shout together, so that they may know what we have decided."

"Right! Right! To the Shool!" cried a chorus of voices.

A common feeling of triumph running through them, they took each other friendly-wise by the hand, and made gaily for the court of the Shool. When they got into the town, they fell on each other's necks, and kissed each other with tears and joy. They knew their plan was the best and most excellent that could be devised, and would protect them all from further shame and trouble.

The Pidvorkes shuddered to hear their tread.

All the remaining inhabitants, big and little, men and women, gathered in the court of the Shool, and stood with pale faces and beating hearts to see what would happen.

The eyes of the young bachelors rolled uneasily, the girls had their faces on one another's shoulders, and sobbed.

Breindel, agile as a cat, climbed on to the highest millstone, and proclaimed in a voice of thunder:

"Seeing that such and such a thing has happened, a great scandal such as is not to be hid, and such as we do not wish to hide, all we women have decided to excommunicate----"

Such a tumult arose that for a minute or two Breindel could not be heard, but it was not long before everyone knew who and what was meant.

"We also demand that neither he nor his nearest friends shall be called to the Reading of the Law; that people shall have nothing to do with them till after the wedding!"

"Nothing to do with them! Nothing to do with them!" shook the air.

"That people shall not lend to them nor borrow of them, shall not come within their four ells!" continued the voice from the millstone.

"And _she_ shall be shut up till her time comes, so that no one shall see her. Then we will take her to the burial-ground, and the child shall be born in the burial-ground. The wedding shall take place by day, and without musicians--"

"Without musicians!"

"Without musicians!"

'Without musicians!"

"Serve her right!"

"She deserves worse!"

A hundred voices were continually interrupting the speaker, and more women were climbing onto the millstones, and shouting the same things.

"On the wedding-day there will be great black candles burning throughout the whole town, and when the bride is seated at the top of the marriage-hall, with her hair flowing loose about her, all the girls shall surround her, and the Badchen shall tell her, 'This is the way we treat one who has not held to her Jewishness, and has blackened all our faces----'"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"So it is!"

"The apostates!"

The last words struck the hearers' hearts like poisoned arrows. A deathly pallor, born of unrealized terror at the suggested idea, overspread all their faces, their feelings were in a tumult of shame and suffering. They thirsted and longed after their former life, the time before the calamity disturbed their peace. Weary and wounded in spirit, with startled looks, throbbing pulses, and dilated pupils, and with no more than a faint hope that all might yet be well, they slowly broke the stillness, and departed to their homes.



THE MANGO-SEED

by Katharine(F. Gerould

From Internet Archive's etext of *Vain Oblations*

THE two young men looked at each other rather helplessly. Then "Marty" Martin drew a few ragged words over his helplessness. " I'm sorry, Peter really, awfully. I'll be back in an hour. And do buck up. But you have bucked up, you really have. You look ever so much better than you did when we went to lunch. And I'll be back. Oh, you can depend on me." He drifted off through the door. His muscles were tense with haste, but he fingered chairs and tables as he went as if trying to put clogs of decency on feet indecorously winged. Even so, he was soon out of sight, and Peter Wayne was alone.

" There's no point in saying it isn't rum, because it is," he murmured to himself. " And here" he added, looking about. There was no moral support in those crimson walls, those great pier-glasses, those insignificant writing-tables with red-shaded electric lights, those uncomfortable tapestried armchairs. It wasn't the setting to help you through a crisis. He was in the quietest corner of the most essentially respectable hotel in New York. There were plenty of them scores that were incidentally respectable ; but at the St. Justin respectability had been cherished through years for its own sake, as more important than the register, the cuisine, or the unimpeachable location that no metropolitan progress could render inconvenient. As a very young bachelor with virtually no family ties, he was not familiar with the St. Justin. It wasn't a place where you would expect to get the kind

of thing his kind of human being wanted. He couldn't, for example, have induced Marty to lunch there. They had lunched at Plon's. It was an hotel where you might be perfectly sure your grandparents had stopped. It was natural that his mother should have selected it for their meeting, as she hadn't been in America for well over twenty years. But there was less backing than he had expected, somehow.

Sitting uncomfortably in one of the corners by a writing-table (his back to the window so that the familiar streets shouldn't lure him too much to flight), he took the privilege of the consciously crucial moment. He reviewed his life. It was so very short, after all, that it was easily reviewed. He was only a few months out of the university, and he was just twenty-two. The insoluble was there to the point of being either romantic or absurd, he didn't know which. He had what so many young people long for in vain, a mystery. He had amused himself occasionally with monstrous hypotheses. But what real account could he give of himself ? What account, that is, of the sort that Marty Martin and his like had by heart before they could spell ? The most that he knew about his parents except that they were alive and in the tropics was that they banked in Honolulu and had some natural hold or other on Marty Martin's uncle. Marty Martin's uncle had picked out Peter's school and his college for him, and was telegraphed for when Peter had appendicitis. That was as near the parental relation as anything he had known from experience. Lonely ? Well, any fellow was lonely when the other fellows all went trooping home for holidays ; but loneliness he

had always frankly diagnosed as three-quarters pride. The fellows were always glad to get back to school or college, he noticed. In any case, he had stopped thinking about it much his plight. That saved his dignity. What he sat now vaguely dreading was the immense, the cataclysmic downfall of his dignity. He tried to put the facts to himself so simply that they should be as reassuring as a primer. Ollendorf, he had once complained to a teacher, would take the zest out of a murder, the sense out of a scandal. Tragedy was a verbal matter. Put a crime into any foreign language, and it sounded like a laundry list. He would try, as it were, to find the French for his situation.

" Oh, rot ! " he began, taking his own advice quite seriously. " It isn't so Sudermannish as all that. My father and my mother chose to go to the tropics to live, a year after I was born. They did not take me with them. They have never sent for me ; but they have supported me ; they have written to me occasionally ; they have got Marty Martin's uncle to keep me out of the hands of the S.P.C.C., and trained me generally to do without them. I've never been invited to go to Tahiti. And Tahiti isn't like London if you know any one there, you can't go without an invitation. They can't have turned against me, when I was eleven months old, on account of my vices. I've kept pretty jolly and managed to regularize the situation with my friends. Now my mother has written that she's coming to America to see me. Indeed, she has actually come. I wasn't allowed to meet her at a steamer, decently. I have to meet her here here." (He looked gloomily around at the conventional walls.) " Yet she

doesn't seem to be staying here. I don't know whether she will want tea, or where to take her to dinner. I don't know her when I see her. I don't know oh, hang it, I don't know anything ! And if I could funk it, like Marty, I would. But what can you do when a lady takes the trouble to bring you into the world ? If it had been my father, now, I wouldn't I positively wouldn't have consented to meet him. It's it's no way to treat a fellow."

His vain attempt at Ollendorfian flatness broke down : the mere facts seemed so very much against him. He had often complained to Marty Martin that it was dashed awkward, this being the only original changeling; but, in point of fact, he had never been so uncomfortable in his life as now, at the prospect of playing the authentic filial role. " I'll make her dine here," he muttered. He could think of nothing worse without being actually disrespectful. An old lady in a gray shawl walked slowly down the hall past the door, and it suddenly struck him that his mother would perhaps like to dine at the St. Justin. " I ought to have cabled to ask what colour her shawl would be," he began, in a flippant whisper, to himself. The flippant whisper stopped. He was much too genuinely nervous to be flippant any longer without an audience. At the same time, he found himself wondering oh, insincerely, theatrically, rhetorically wondering why he had not bought an etiquette book. There was something well, to be honest, something like an extra gland in his throat, something like a knot in his healthy young nerves that kept him from putting the question to himself audibly. " If she cries " he reflected, with anticipatory vindictiveness.

What he really meant was : " If she makes me so much as sniff." For your mother was really the one person in the world who had you necessarily at a disadvantage. Even if you hadn't the habit of her, you couldn't count on yourself for reticence. You might be as bored as possible, but that wouldn't save you. There might be treacheries of the flesh, disloyalties of the cuticle all manner of reversions to embryonic helplessness. She somehow had your nerves, your physical equilibrium, at her mercy. Old Stein, prodding at you with instruments in the psychological laboratory, was a mere joke in comparison. Even the most deceived, the most docile and voluble student ended respectably in a card catalogue. Peter felt suddenly an immense tenderness for the decencies, the unrealities of " science." But to meet your mother in conditions like these was the real thing : the naked horror of revelation. " It's literature," thought Peter to himself, " and what is literature but just the very worst life can do?" He came back to his familiar conclusive summary. It was rum.

The next quarter of an hour passed more mercifully. The mere empty lapse of time helped him, half duped him into thinking that the scene might not come off at all. It was foolish to be there ahead of time, but what could a man in his predicament do, or pretend to do, between luncheon and an interview like that ? They had had, he and Marty, a civilized meal at Plon's ; but he had not been hungry, and to smoke among the stunted box-trees afterward had been well, impossible. They had got to the St. Justin ridiculously early, and then Marty had bolted. Peter didn't bear him any grudge for that ; of

course it was perfectly proper for Marty to bolt. It would have been worse, he began to think, to face her first before a witness.

By this time he had accepted the smallest writing-room of the St. Justin as the predestined scene of the great encounter ; accepted it as, perhaps divinely, perhaps diabolically, but at all events supernaturally, appointed. These walls had been decorated by dead people to be unsympathetic and grossly unfit witnesses of Peter Wayne's embarrassment. To that extent they belonged to him. The sudden superstition was genuine ; so genuine that he found himself resenting a bit of chatter that sprang up outside the door and, even more, the immediate quick entrance into the writing-room of one of the chatterers. Why hadn't his mother given him an appointment in her own sitting-room, at her own hotel whatever that might be? He didn't know; he knew nothing of her since the wireless message that had made the appointment ; and of course since she was managing the thing that way he hadn't even tried to meet her at her steamer, though it had actually docked at some un earthly hour that morning. But she was likely to pay, too, for her perversity, since the lady who had just come in and had sat down rather aimlessly at one of the tables would probably annoy her as much as she did him. He had owned or pretended ? to Marty Martin a furtive curiosity as to this mother of his, whom he had virtually never seen, of whom he hadn't so much as a photograph. Now something quite different stirred within him : the instinct to protect her against any thing she would not like. He suddenly saw her frail and weary and overwrought and quite old pathetically, not ironically, like the little

old lady who had hobbled past the door and lie resented any detail that might crown her long effort at reunion with an extra thorn. He was sure she would hate this other woman's being there the younger woman who had just come in, and sat down so nonchalantly.

This lady obviously intended to stop long enough for their discomfiture, since just here he got up and looked at his watch as he did so it lacked scarce two minutes of the appointed hour. He looked at the intruder a little impatiently. She wasn't writing. Perhaps he could suggest, by some flicker of expression, some implication of gesture, that he wasn't there in that ridiculous galley for nothing, and still less there for casual company. She was slim and smartly veiled and outrageously made up. That was all he saw out of the corner of his eye, but it was enough to make him feel that she had no such rights at the St. Justin as a reunited mother and child. She wasn't waiting for a parent, he knew ; only for some frivolous friend or other. He was so nervous as to wonder if there were any conceivable way in which one could ask her to go into one of the other rooms. A depopulated chain of them stretched down the corridor. He threw another glance at her. She was well dressed. Peter, though he might know as little as a poodle about the nature of the current fashion, could, like most men, pounce unerringly on the unfashionable. Her exuberance wasn't a matter of gewgaws ; it was all in the meretricious harmonies of her features and complexion. And yet Peter caught himself away from staring, as he passed her, but one glance was enough to show him that it was a perfectly honest mask ; her paint and powder were as respectable as blue glasses.

Again he knew it unerringly. He was glad to recognize it. For at that moment he became so nervous that he did, without a qualm, the most preposterous thing he had ever done, even at two-and-twenty.

His mother was imminent ; he knew it in a hundred ways. The atmosphere was charged with more than the mere prospect, was charged with the actual certainty of her. He found that he was going to put it to the lady who sat there. He stood in the door of the writing-room and looked down the dark hall. It was empty, save for a woman who sat humbly near, bonneted, veiled, faithfully clasping some kind of bag obviously a servant. Remembering the bit of chatter, he fancied it the maid of the intruding lady. No one else was in sight. Yet somehow he knew that his mother would be on time : the crispness of her earlier cablegrams promised it. The lady really must go elsewhere, and the maid old and " coloured " and manifestly respectable must move down the hall and sit outside another door. He went back, and this time walked straight across to the stranger.

" Will you pardon me, madam " (" madam " was a deplorable word, but the powder some how demanded an extravagant formality), "if I speak to you, to ask you something very odd ? "

She stared at him through her fantastically patterned veil.

" I have been put in the position of having to meet an elderly lady a near relative here for a more or less intimate conversation. I

don't think she realized, in making the appointment, how little privacy you have a right to in an hotel. It is very long since she has been in a great city. Will you pardon the the really unpardonable liberty of my asking if you are likely to be here much longer ? I mean ought I to arrange to take her elsewhere in the hotel when she comes ? She will be here in a moment."

It was a dreadful thing to have had to do, and, if he judged by what the veil showed of the lady's face, it couldn't have been worse done. She looked dismayed. Peter was angry : so angry that he managed to stop just where he had stationed himself before her ; so angry that he didn't deprecate, that he simply set his teeth and waited. There was nothing he could do now, he felt, to convince her that she hadn't been insulted.

She lifted her veil ever so little, just freeing her lips, slightly constricted by its tight-drawn mesh. And she did so, she both rose and spoke.

" Aren't you Peter Wayne ? "

He bowed, relieved. If they had a ground of acquaintance, he could perhaps cover it all up, make it plausible, get rid of her on some dishonest, hilarious pretext. " I am." He waited ; there was no use in pretending that he remembered her.

The veil was lifted farther, then a hand was laid on his shoulder and a voice sounded in his astonished ears. " Turn to the light, my son, and let me look at you. I've not had a photograph, you remember, since you were

a child."

Even as he faced the light, he was saying to himself that it was rummer than ever ; but it was rummest when he turned for his legitimate look at her. She was older than he had assumed the strange lady to be ; but she was a long way from the little old lady in the gray shawl. This was his mother, and it was over he felt it as those sinking for the third time may feel. In another instant he saw his mistake. He had been pulled up out of the surge into the terrible air this was his mother, and it had just begun ! He mastered his breath his breath that under the water had been playing tricks with him. He looked her over, searching stare for searching stare. Her fair hair had lost what must once have been a golden lustre, but it was carefully, elaborately arranged, waved, curled, braided. It was as fashionable as her clothes. The white mask of powder left clear the contour of the fine, thin nose but cloaked the subtler modellings of the face. The blue eyes, idle yet content, looked at him from behind it ; below them it was rent, once, by the scarlet stab of the mouth. Peter remembered vaguely having heard that the tropical sun necessitated such protection. It was the northern dimness and drizzle that turned make-up into a moral question. Even for the grands boulevards^ to be sure, Mrs. Wayne's make-up would have been overdone. This was the chief result of his searching stare. She wasn't like one's mother at all, confound it ! not like any one's mother. He would have been glad of a little more sophistication than even at wise two-and-twenty he was conscious of possessing.

" Your maid ? " he asked, remembering the figure outside the door.

" Oh, yes ; my old Frances. She recalls you as a baby. She'll want to see you. You must speak to her before we go."

" But you're not going "

"I find I'd better get off to-night. I've learned since landing, that if I do, I can just get a boat at Vancouver. It's not as if I had any business to do. You'll take me to dinner somewhere some restaurant. I don't like hotels."

" But you don't mean you've come for only twenty-four hours across all that ? "

The straight red mouth elongated itself into a smile. " If there weren't so much of it to cross, I could, perhaps, stay longer. I came only to say one or two things."

She spoke as if she had run up from her country place for the day. Peter suddenly revolted against this careless treatment of his plight. He was glad if his prayers had succeeded in averting tragedy. At the same time, he didn't intend to be turned into farce. He hadn't let himself in for all this only to be shirked as he had been shirked for more than twenty years. He meant to know things, hang it ! He had been afraid of a scene ; afraid of twenty years' emotion expressed in an hour ; of a creation of human ties as violent and sudden as the growth of the tree from the mango-seed in the fakir's hands. " In ten minutes you eat the ripe mango," a globe-trotting friend had told him. If he

hadn't the fakir's miracle to fear, well and good ; but neither was he going to suffer the other extreme, the complete dehumanizing of the experience. After all, she was his mother, hang it ! If she wasn't going to make him pay well, he would make her pay. Somebody had to get something out of so preposterous a situation. He leaned forward.

" Things you couldn't write ? Or have you just funkyed it, on the way ? "

" Funked it ? " Her vocabulary apparently did not hold the word.

" I mean oh, I mean, let us talk straight.

You've let it all go for more than twenty years. Now you take it all up again. I'm a gentle man, I hope. I didn't bolt, though you can bet I wanted to. It would have been easier never to have seen you at all."

" You've never wanted to see your mother ? "

Peter looked out of the window into the familiar street. If it hadn't been for the utter detachment of her tone, he would have felt that she was hitting below the belt.

" What do you take me for ? I've nearly died of well, call it interest, more times than I can count up. No little boy likes to have no mother ; likes to have his mother care nothing for him. But I've grown perfectly used to it. And I know I know now, mind you that you don't care. Well, it may not be what I should have chosen, but at least it lets me out. It's too late, now, to make me

care."

It was by no means the whole truth. But
it was what he had been trying, and in vain,
to say to himself an hour since about it all.
There was some triumph in being able to say
it now to her.

Her blue eyes turned on him a stranger's
sudden kindness. " Where those years bad,

Peter ? I thought they'd be less bad if you
began them very young. You see, they had to
begin some time."

" Oh, they began and they lasted. Now,
they're not bad at all. So why rake it all up
now ? "

If she had been little and old and shaking,
he couldn't have pressed the question, he
knew. The powdered cheeks, the elaborate
hair, the vermilion lips gave him a kind of
sanction. There was a pitiful way of wearing
rouge, no doubt ; this wasn't pitiful in the
least. He didn't know what she looked like
underneath the mask, but he could almost have
sworn she didn't need it.

" I'm not trying to do that. If I've come
too late, it's because I feel quite sure that it's
too late to undo any of it. I am not trying "
her brilliant, dyed smile was extraordinarily
little in the maternal tradition "to get a single
claw into you. I've come to pay damages,
Peter, not to claim them. But you must be
very, very, very polite to me. I'm not used to
anything else. And America rather frightens

me."

" I don't want to be anything but polite," murmured Peter, abashed. " And the freer you really are, the more it's up to you to play the game, don't you think ? "

She smiled vaguely, and he saw at once that she belonged to the generation that preceded slangy paradox. She might also have worn a fluffy gray shawl.

" I'm sure you don't wish to be anything but polite," she brought out, still vaguely.

" But I've odd things to say, and I've come a long way to say them ; and you, my son, must listen."

" It's what I'm here for."

" Evidemment. How much has Spencer Martin told you ? "

" Old Martin ? Nothing at all, ever except the figure of my allowance."

" Not why we first went to Hawaii ? "

" Good Lord, no ! I might have been a foundling."

" You didn't ask ? " She had taken off her gray glove ; and pushed her veil up farther on her forehead, with beautiful white fingers.

" No," answered Peter curtly. " A fellow wouldn't ask. You can see that."

She seemed to muse. " He would have told you that, I think, if you had. There was no reason why you shouldn't know."

" I naturally supposed, if there was no reason why I shouldn't know, you'd have seen to it that I was told."

" So you thought there was something disgraceful something that drove us out of America?"

" It has occurred to me. But I never let myself worry about it. And old Martin himself was a kind of proof that there wasn't."

" There wasn't." She echoed his words in a disdainful, emphatically affirmative tone.

" No, Peter, not that." She paused for a moment, staring out into the gray street.

" These women are very ugly, aren't they ? " she asked irrelevantly. " On the boat, they were horrors. And they jerked about so did so many things. Do the men like them that way ? " Her tone was desultory.

" I suppose so." He felt a mischievous desire to tell her how little the men he knew would probably like them her way ; but, in fact, the slow conviction was encroaching on his mind not so much penetrating it as fluidically enwrapping it that she was composed of many graces. Her gestures, for example : they were all slow, and each showed off something, if only, for an instant, some lesser, some negligible contour. She had the air of not having stirred a limb or a feature for years, except to please, and of being now in the practice infallible. She was very femi

nine no, hang it ! that dairymaid word wouldn't do. (Peter had been, in college, the proudest product of his several " theme-courses," and the quest of the epithet was not unknown to him.) She was very simple and very sophisticated. He had to leave it at that.

" I'll tell you about our leaving America. You ought to have known long since. And yet perhaps it was better your sympathies shouldn't have been touched. If you thought we were brutes, that would leave you free, wouldn't it ? "

" It did."

" Ah, yes exactly ! " She seemed to triumph for an instant. Then she looked out of the window again, and again spoke irrelevantly. " Are you in love ? "

Peter frowned. " No." He was too young not to be stiff about it.

" That's rather a pity. I could have explained better."

" Oh, I know what it stands for."

She corrected him gently. " It ' stands for ' nothing whatever. Either you've loved or you haven't. It might have helped me that's all." Then she seemed to brace herself for difficult exposition.

" Listen, Peter. You must know this first. In the months just following your birth, every thing changed. Your father developed tuberculosis alarmingly, it was then supposed. That meant another climate. He owned

property in Honolulu. It occurred to him to go there. In not taking you we acted on physicians' advice. There was no telling what sort of life we might have to live. You were best off here. You were under expert care, and in those days we had news of you constantly. I am quite well aware " her voice grew surer as she went on ; she seemed less fantastically feminine, more simply human " that many women would have chosen differently. For me there could be no question. You had been brought into the world in the belief that there would be no choice to make. We never dreamed, when you were born, of anything but the normal American life. I insist on your realizing that."

Peter bowed. It already began to change his vision of himself a little, though he wasn't sure he liked his mystery to be merely tubercular. Though if that was all, why in the world but he saw that he could only listen and wait.

" Then Honolulu didn't serve very long. We had to go farther away from life. Now we're in Tahiti. It's it's a very wonderful climate."

Mrs. Wayne rose, drew the crimson curtain to one side, and looked out. It was a moment before she spoke, and as she spoke she sat down again with helpless grace.

" I find it very hard to tell. I don't think I can tell you it all."

" I don't see why you should have come at all, unless you are going to tell me everything there is to tell. But if you've really farked

it, I don't care, you know." Thus Peter, maintaining his bravado.

" You don't help me out." The blue eyes rested on him critically. " But I suppose it's not your fault. Since you don't know any thing about anything "

" I can't give you a leg up. No."

She frowned a little, as if troubled by his phrasing, but resigned herself to it. " No ; you can't give me a leg up/'

" I say " He leaned forward with a sudden impulse. " Why don't I go back with you ? Or come out later ? Lots of people going to Tahiti now, you know, since they've exhausted the Spanish Main. Plenty of attractions : drives round the island, perfect scenery, native customs on tap ordeal by fire and hot stones. It's in the advertisements along with the rates and sailings. No reason why I shouldn't come."

She had drawn back while he spoke with a perfectly obvious terror. With parted lips, and coiled hair, and her very blood (it seemed) turned white, she looked like Greek tragic masks that he had seen in museums. These he had always thought grinning prevarications ; now, he acknowledged their authenticity. His jauntiness faded into a stare. Then she pulled herself together, as Peter would have said, by slow, difficult degrees, like a kaleidoscope turned too slowly pitiful to see.

" No, Peter, you must never come to Tahiti. He he couldn't bear it."

" He ? "

" Your father/'

" Oh my father." His imagination had not yet evoked his father. " I had forgotten him, for the moment."

" Forgotten him ! What extraordinary things you say ! "

" Well, why shouldn't I forget him ? He hasn't even taken the trouble to spend twenty-four hours in America to make my acquaintance." Something acrid had risen in the cup, and Peter's lips were bitter.

Her white fingers moved again to the folds of her veil, as if the frail mesh weighed intolerably upon her brows.

" If you forget him, of course I can never explain. He is all there is." She indulged then in an appraising glance. " You look kind and good. I didn't think you would be undutiful."

Undutiful ! It was her turn to introduce an unfamiliar vocabulary. " Undutiful ! " Peter repeated. " What do you mean ? That I'm expected to be grateful to him for being my father ? "

She smiled. She lifted her hands. She all but applauded him. " Yes, just that ! "

Peter stared. He had two favourite words with which to describe the legitimately surprising. One of them was " rum." But such

an idea as this called for the other. It was positively "rococo."

She went on then. Apparently his ironic question had smitten the rock, for the fluent tale gushed forth, watering all the arid past. But to Peter it was as if a man blinded and drenched with spray should try to drink of it. The first sentences came too quickly. In all his two-and-twenty years they found no context. He had still to learn the way of them. He supposed it was because he was finding out at last what it was to have a real mother.

"It wasn't always Tahiti," he heard her saying after a little. "We've tried everything south of the equator, I've sometimes thought. Valparaiso, for a long time. Perhaps you knew? Spencer Martin"

"Never even told me when you changed your continent." He was blindly bitter. Somehow it did hurt, as she went on.

"The climate," Mrs. Wayne murmured again. And then she named other stages of their progress all places, Peter reflected, that were in the geographies and in Kipling, and nowhere else. It made his parents sound like vagabonds of fiction. Her trailing narrative did not add to their reality. The details she mentioned were wildly exotic, and those she took for granted he could not supply. Her careful English was interlarded with strange scraps of Spanish and native names for things which left the objects, for him, unrecognizable. He made nothing out of it except that it wasn't what he should call a life at all. He didn't even see whether it was whim or

necessity that controlled them. As soon as anything in her story became coherent or comprehensible, she doubled on her tracks. At first he threw in occasional questions, but the answers didn't explain ; and soon he stopped asking them. A foreignness like that left his very curiosities unphraseable. He came to the point where he didn't even know what it was that he wanted to know. There was, to be sure, the irregularly recurrent stress on the hope of health, an obsession, apparently, under which they had faintly struggled and madly rambled ; but he didn't make much more sense than what he had learned in childhood about Ponce de Leon. You might as well ask a firefly to show you your way. Clearly, she hadn't the gift of biography. He sat very still and intent, trying to make a pattern out of it ; but she merely succeeded in dazing him. Then suddenly, when he was most bewildered, it came to an end, ran out in a mere confession of failure.

" And nowhere, at any time, has the miracle happened. He has never been well enough to come back. We have always had to stay away."

" It must have been a strange life," Peter mused.

" Strange ? It may be. Strange for him, no doubt : so fitted for civilization for your world."

" You speak as if it weren't yours."

" Oh, mine," she said simply ; " he was mine. I don't ask for more civilization than that than my husband."

It was the most sentimental speech that Peter had ever heard from human lips, and he stared incredulously. But incredulity faded. Her tone of voice worked on him even after she fell silent. He still felt its vibration in the air while the mask shifted subtly before his eyes. Somehow, as she sat there, breathing such simple passion from her intricate adornments, she became at once more astounding and more intelligible. One saw it all even Peter, in his young and untutored heart, knew infallibly. She had loved her husband supremely, and she had chucked everything for him. She had chucked so much, in fact, that she had even lost all sense of the worth of what she had cast away. She had nothing left to measure it by. Peter felt that America itself was a good deal to have chucked. It soothed his pride a little, to be sure, to have her treat New York so cavalierly. She hadn't so much as looked at it ; and she had circumnavigated the globe for him. It was clear, too, that every moment of the journey was a kind of torture to her. Her very look round the room divulged an agony of strangeness and suspense. She was just longing to be back on her island. Peter thrilled a little foolishly to it. He fancied it was a grande passion. The only grande passion Peter had hitherto known had been that of a sophomore friend for his landlady's daughter. That, though it had been enhanced by proper detail of elopement, disinheritance, and threats of suicide, had disappointed them all in the end. The bride was rather silly and tried to borrow money ; and when Peter and Marty, in their senior year, had reread Lawrence's sonnet-sequence, they had found that it didn't scan. But this was different. Whatever his mother had undertaken, she had obviously put it through.

After all those years of marriage, to have your voice vibrate like that ! It had never occurred to Peter that a fellow's mother could still be in love with his father. Even in novels mothers weren't. As for life : he recalled the parents that he knew. He had never seen another woman with just that look, the look of a dedicated being, of some one whose bloom had been, first and last, both jealously hoarded and lavishly spent. She was like a woman out of a harem : a million graces for one man, but a mere veiled bundle to all the rest. That was the secret of her uniqueness. She was a charming woman to whom the notion of charming the world at large would be blasphemous. Her mood had been slowly orientalized to match her exterior, which had gradually grown exotic. She would die in suttee. Peter felt her quality no less poignantly because his words for it were unsure. Of course she didn't want to stay in America ! Of course she was off to Vancouver at midnight ! And yet why, why had she come ? Would she never explain ?

She had been looking out of the window while he soliloquized it was part of the whole sub-tropical spectacle of her that she should limit herself to so few hours, and then be as languid as if she had leased a suite at the St. Justin for life. She turned just as Peter had made up his mind to speak.

" There was one summer when you wanted to do the Caucasus, I remember a rather queer trip that was going to cost a great deal. We were sorry I was dreadfully sorry that you couldn't go."

Peter frowned. There you were ! She

crammed the supreme interview of a lifetime into an hour, and then had the audacity to be irrelevant.

" We couldn't afford it just then. It it was a very expensive year. I had to tell Spencer we couldn't. I hope you didn't hate us for it."

Peter laughed. " I didn't even know you had anything to do with it. Old Martin didn't tell me it was funds. He just wet-blanketed the whole thing said it wasn't safe and he couldn't hear of it. I didn't mind much. I went to Murray Bay to visit another chap. But, I say do you mean old Martin asked you ? "

" He cabled."

" And you? "

" I cabled back."

" Has he been consulting you about me all these years ? In cases like that, when I didn't dream of it ? "

" Oh, only occasionally," she hastened to say. " We haven't been spying on you."

" No, I should hope not." Then he called himself a queer duck, aggrieved for twenty years because he hadn't been spied on, and now aggrieved at the thought that he might be.

" Was it you, by the way," he asked, " who were interested in my affairs, or my father ? " Her pronouns had been a little confusing.

" Your father has had, more and more, to leave all correspondence to me." For the first time, her words came glibly. She had evidently packed that sentence in her trunk before starting.

" Is he so very ill ? " Peter had veered at last to an interest in his other parent ; it was clear that his other parent was the real clue to the mystery.

" Oh, horribly horribly ! " It was almost a cry. She bent forward. " So ill, Peter, so ill that you mustn't come now, ever. He loathes it so being so ill. And he is so very proud as why shouldn't he be ? Can't you see how he would mind ? Do you think I'd have come if it had been possible to send for you ? Do you think I'd have left him if there had been any other way ? I'm not sure, as it is, that I ought to have come. It has been terrible, to be getting farther away every day ; to know that I'm as far away from him as it is possible to be on this earth. And think what it must be for him, alone and there ! "

Well, she was as pathetic now as any little old lady in a gray shawl could be ; only she was, somehow, tragic too. Her face was like the white grave of beauty. Peter was stupefied.

" There ? " he repeated.

She flung out her hands. " On a savage island. Think of him on a savage island ! "

" I can't, very well," murmured Peter inaudibly. Then : " But has he always been so

ill ? For twenty years ? Or " he fixed her a little more directly " is there something besides illness ? "

She did not answer. She rose and looked out of the window, and as Peter rose and stood beside her, she lifted one hand to his shoulder. There was something ineffably gracious in the gesture. She seemed to be making it all up to him. " Such a patched life, Peter," she murmured. " You can't blame him for not having wanted me to come."

" Oh, he didn't want you to come ? "

She hesitated for an instant. " No. And now I must go."

" Now ? " he asked stupidly.

" Oh, yes, at once. I shan't have time to dine with you." She looked helplessly about for a scarf that she had thrown down.

" But no ! " Peter broke out. " It's preposterous. To come like this and go like this ! Your train doesn't go for hours if you will go to-night."

" But I haven't arranged for it. I haven't packed."

" Why, you haven't unpacked ! " he cried.

" Oh, I think Frances may have. And I mustn't fail to get off. There are the tickets to get, too. Peter, I must go." She spoke as if to delay were unspeakable treason ; and, as she spoke, she turned to cross the room to the door.

" I say," said Peter, standing squarely in her way, " why did you come ? You shan't go without telling me that." It wasn't the way to speak to one's mother, but she had chosen to discard the maternal code.

She broke off in the act of withdrawal and turned to him. Her blue eyes were tearless but very sad. " I loved you dearly when you were very little," she said simply. " I've never quite forgotten that. I suddenly realized that, if I waited any longer, I could never come. I think it was a cruel and foolish thing for me to do, and I'm a little ashamed of it ; but kiss me, Peter."

Before he obeyed, he clutched at one more straw. " You won't see old Martin ? "

" I said good-bye to him a great many years ago." She smiled. " I had no one to see in America except you. No there's a cab waiting. Good-bye."

He kissed her then. It was clear to him that he might only watch her go. He saw her stop to rouse the old servant who waited in the hall. Then she passed, with strange grace, out of his life.

There was only one tone to take with Marty, who arrived, as always, late and breathless. " She's the most charming woman I've ever met, and it's the devil's own luck that she had to go straight on to Vancouver to get a steamer back. My father who is apparently a charmer, by the way is very ill. She's wonderful. It's the biggest thing that has ever happened to me. She's made everything as

right as right. But I can't tell you about it.
After twenty years you understand, old
man "

It was less the loyal friend than the loyal
son ; but he was still, dining that night at
Plon's (he wondered where the deuce she was
dining), very much under her dominion.
She had brought with her a rare illumination.
He would never forget her voice and her
veiled eyes. He hadn't dreamed a woman
could suggest her love in so many silent ways.
She just 'was adoration, implicit and incarnate.
It was tremendous to have seen it. The white
light it threw on Lawrence's bride ! The
-white light it threw, for that matter, on all the
women he knew ! He felt himself bursting
with knowledge.

It was not until after dinner, indeed, that he
realized just how wonderful in another way
she had been, and with how little knowledge
of another sort she had left him. She had
told him absolutely nothing. So far as he was
concerned, her narrative had only concealed
events. He couldn't remember whether New
Zealand had followed or preceded Chile ; and
his sincere impression was that it didn't matter,
even to them. Anything that in all those
years had mattered, had been dropped away
out of sight between her sentences. If he had
been by his hour both racked and inebriated
(for that was what his state of tension amounted
to), it was not because of any facts she had
given him. She had not even answered his
plain questions. She had left him in dismay
as soon as he had begun to ask them. He saw
that now, though in his simplicity he hadn't
seen it before. He had been sacrificed again,
as he had always been sacrificed. His mystery

was still his mystery, and he was still left alone with his monstrous hypotheses. He wouldn't have missed it for anything not even for good old Marty. But he turned to Marty at last with compunction.

" Marty, old man," he said, " it 'was rum."



NOTES

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